backroom briefings
John Curtin's war
CLEM LLOYD & RICHARD HALL
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John Curtin's war

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from original notes compiled by Frederick T. Smith

National Library of Australia
Canberra 1997
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Frederick Thomas Smith was born in Balmain, Sydney, on 18 December 1904, one of a family of two brothers and two sisters. His family subsequently moved to Kogarah and then to Rockdale in Sydney’s southern suburbs where Smith grew up. He caught a train each day to Cleveland Street Boys High School, near Sydney’s Central Station, matriculating and doing well in French and Latin. He left school at 15 to work as a copy boy at the Evening News in King Street, Sydney. In the 1930s Smith was a State political reporter with the country press, working for Utting’s News Service. In 1939 he joined another news agency, Australian United Press (AUP), becoming bureau chief and manager of its Canberra office. At the time, AUP serviced almost all of Australia’s country newspapers. Smith was close to Donald Kilgour Rodgers, Curtin’s shrewd and politically sensitive press secretary.

In May–June 1944, Smith led an Australian press delegation to Canada, a delegation which also included Allan Dawes of the Melbourne Herald and Don Whitington of Sydney’s Daily Telegraph. The delegation travelled 10 000 miles across Canada from Vancouver on the west coast and the Yukon to Newfoundland and Nova Scotia in the east. As is often the case with working journalists, when the professional roles were reversed and the interviewer was interviewed by Canadian journalists, Smith showed highly developed skills in conveying the scope and intensity of Australia’s war effort to an international audience.

After the war ended, he joined the Sydney-based magazine publishing house of K.G. Murray in 1946, working mainly on administrative matters rather than writing. He became managing director of K.G. Murray, retiring in 1972 when the firm was taken over by Sir Frank Packer’s Consolidated Press. In his leisure time, he revived his studies of French, achieving a notable fluency. K.G. Murray’s involvement in ski-field development allowed him to become a skilled skier. He was also an expert woodworker and made his own furniture.

Although Smith always spoke with great admiration of Curtin and his conduct of the wartime prime ministership, his family and colleagues do not recall him as having any particular political affiliation. He was a dapper dresser and a trifle formal in manner. He married Jean Hegarty in 1931 and the family lived at Rockdale until the end of the war, subsequently moving to Wahroonga on Sydney’s North Shore. Fred Smith died on 4 February 1992.
FRED SMITH AND THE SECRET BRIEFINGS

In November 1972 Fred Smith, a bureau head and senior journalist in Canberra’s Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery, deposited a bulky brown folder in the Manuscript Section of the National Library of Australia. In the folder was a wad of fading typescript and a photograph of John Curtin, sitting at his desk surrounded by a group of senior journalists. The typescripts contained transcription of Smith’s notes of briefings given by Curtin to a select group of Canberra Press Gallery journalists covering much of the Second World War, from June 1942 until late January 1945. They range over the strategic, military and political conduct of Australia’s participation in the war from the immediate aftermath of the Battle of the Coral Sea (in May 1942) to early 1945 when the war’s end was clearly discernible, and Curtin, his crushing responsibilities discharged, was drifting towards death.

At the personal level, Smith’s recording of the press briefings provides an unsurpassed picture of Curtin’s expression, his inflections, his verbal mannerisms, his force and eloquence, his swingeing irony, his mild profanity and occasional obscenity. Smith gives us very little sense of Curtin’s physical presence—what today would be called his ‘body language’—apart from generalisations that the Prime Minister looked ‘better’ or ‘unwell’, or that he was ‘particularly bitter’ towards a hapless reporter whose newspaper had provoked his wrath. He illustrates most vividly, however, the full spectrum of what might be called Curtin’s table-talk—the Prime Minister talking colloquially but mostly with composure and control to a group of trusted intimates, conveying and receiving political intelligence, mulling over the turns and shifts of momentous events. It is very much a one-sided portrait because the emphasis is wholly on Curtin’s exposition. The contributions of the intermediary journalists are treated largely as cues and there is virtually no projection of discourse.

Although the framework of the press briefings and their content often seem much the same from day to day, Curtin’s distinctive tone and often unexpected twists of phrase and interpretation lift them above the mundane.
Despite the moderation and detachment of much of Curtin's analysis, his routine exposition builds a cumulative power as, over 40 months, the war moves from virtual defeat to assured victory. Curtin never exceeds the bounds of the possible as he expounds and accounts for this transformation, setting it resonantly in a context of global strategy. Nor does he gloat as the emergent triumph of the Allies unfurls. There is a sense of composed gratification, but also a hint of incredulity, that what began very badly has turned out so well.

Counterpointing the incisive, sometimes passionate Curtin is the detached, astringent reporter Fred Smith, who selects and shapes the material, mostly reporting Curtin's words verbatim but also providing occasional comment, filling in background or obtaining elaboration from Curtin's extremely able press secretary, Don Rodgers, and other members of the administration. What Smith provides is very much the model of the dispassionate, objective journalist, avoiding overly subjective comment and interpretation, largely letting Curtin and the facts find their own voices.

Unquestionably, the 120 or so briefings augment and illuminate our understanding of how Australia fought the Second World War, and give fresh perceptions of its civil and military leaders. Their overall impact in these crucial areas of study, however, is incremental rather than transforming. The official war histories have provided a solid foundation for the political, administrative, social, economic, supply and medical history of the war; Smith's despatches provide a valuable supplement to the great mass of published and archival material already available on Australia's war effort.

**Origins of the press briefings**

It is important to note that these briefings do not begin until mid-1942 when, arguably, the most decisive phase of Curtin's prime ministership was over. Curtin became Prime Minister in October 1941. In December, Japan had struck Pearl Harbor, bringing the United States into the war. Darwin had been bombed early in 1942, although the news had been kept from the Australian community, as the briefings make clear. For the first time in more than 150 years of settlement, white Australians died from enemy assaults on their own territory. Japan conquered the
Philippines, Malaysia and the Netherlands East Indies. The surrender of Singapore to the Japanese sent the Australian 8th Division into three years of captivity. At the request of Curtin’s government, General Douglas MacArthur left the Philippines and came to Australia to take command of the newly created South-West Pacific military zone. The build-up of tens of thousands of American troops began in the South Pacific, especially in Australia. Australia’s military divisions undertook the long and hazardous voyage back from the Middle East to protect their homeland. Finally, the great naval victories of Midway and the Coral Sea in mid-1942 sealed the highwater mark of Japanese expansion based on naval power.

These momentous events are touched on in the briefings only in retrospect, and it is pertinent to ask why. According to Smith, the briefings were instigated by Don Rodgers. In these circumstances, Rodgers latched onto the notion of providing top-secret briefings to senior members of the Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery. In turn, these heads of service (or bureau chiefs) could pass
the confidential information provided by Curtin on to their editors who determined content of their newspapers, and to their proprietors who dictated overall editorial policy. Thus, the Prime Minister could establish direct conduits of information to shape news content, editorial opinion and the perceptions of a difficult and sometimes recalcitrant gaggle of proprietors. By keeping the upper echelons of the press ‘in the know’ about war strategy and conduct of the war at the highest level, the government could ensure the preservation of national security information whose disclosure would jeopardise the safety of troop movements and other military operations.

In short, the press would know what was going on at the highest level but the sacred ‘off-the-record’ conventions of the profession meant that it would not be written or commented on in editorials. Where necessary, material from the briefings could be converted to attributable news by Curtin simply placing it ‘on the record’. Today, this would be stigmatised as ‘news management’, or even ‘news manipulation’. Its practice by Curtin, however, had the irreproachable virtues of being indisputably in the national interest, and arguably in the very survival of a sovereign nation.
The intriguing question is when were the briefings initiated. Curtin’s biographer, Lloyd Ross, suggests that the briefings began soon after Curtin became Prime Minister and that the first briefings were intertwined with formal announcement of the outbreak of war with Japan. Ross relates how Curtin attended a meeting with the War Cabinet in Melbourne on 5 December 1941:

Chatting with a few journalists, he was called away by Frederick Shedden, Secretary to the Cabinet, who had hurried downstairs. ‘Fred has just shown me the cables,’ he said to journalists. ‘A Japanese expedition is on the move. Until we know where it is headed, I shall stay in Melbourne. Get the other fellows together and come round at 9 o’clock.’

Ross also indicates that the briefings had been entrenched by 17 December 1941 when the Parliament adjourned:

Canberra in December was in jitters. At the adjournment of Parliament on the 17th, Evatt moved among the press representatives, talking at great length but telling them little of the real situation and only adding to their fears. At 10.30 pm, Curtin leaned back into his chair wearily. ‘Well boys—anything further?’ The pressmen asked whether on some occasion he would take them into his confidence and describe the strategic situation. ‘No time like the present,’ he replied. Doors were shut, and the attendants excluded. Curtin talked till midnight. Most of the pressmen had been accustomed to hearing Menzies’ polished phrases and were still disposed to dismiss Curtin as a woolly rhetorician, but as they listened to his remarkable description of the world situation, given without notes, without hesitation, without the promptings of an expert at his elbow, they felt his greatness. By midnight all of them were exhausted but the journalists felt that the Prime Minister had revealed sources of great strength.

If this is the case, it is difficult to understand why briefings on the crucial events of the first six months were not reported by Smith to his executives. There may possibly be some administrative explanation, but on what we know of Smith’s career, it seems that he was posted to the Australian United Press bureau in the Parliament House Press Gallery at this time. (Smith’s sequence of briefing reports starts on 30 June 1942.) Don Whitington describes at length the tone, ambience and content of the briefings without indicating when they began:

Curtin had more faith in the integrity of the senior journalists at Canberra than any Prime Minister since, and probably any

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2 Ibid., p. 243.
of his predecessors. A select band—he restricted his twice-
daily press conferences to about ten or twelve heads of
service—knew more about the secret history of the war than
most Members of Parliament excepting the War Cabinet and
the Advisory War Council. Part of the reason for this was that
Curtin wanted editors to know exactly what was happening
so that they would not transgress or rebel against security
censorship ... Apart from his wish to have editors informed
through their senior representative at Canberra however,
Curtin, as a journalist himself, enjoyed talking to and confiding
in people he felt he could trust. His press conferences usually
consisted of him relaxing in a swivel chair, lighting a cigarette
in the holder he always used, leaning back and 'thinking out
loud', to use his own phrase.3

Whittington’s account is unclear about precisely when
the briefings began, but his outline of the content of the
briefings confirms that the format and frequency of the
meetings were well established by June 1942 when the
Smith sequence begins. Most of the examples he lists
occurred in the first half of 1942 and are not recorded
directly by Smith:

At those intimate talks we were told, long before most others
knew, and long before it could be printed, of the departure of
the AIF from the Middle East and its hazardous progress
across the Indian Ocean to Australia. We knew of the bitter
behind-the-scenes arguments between Curtin and Churchill
when Churchill tried unsuccessfully to have the returning
army diverted to Burma where, as events transpired, it would
have been lost. We knew of the impending arrival of Douglas
MacArthur, of the preparations being made for the hush-hush
arrival of the first wave of American troops. Later Curtin
confided the news of the Battle of the Coral Sea, the planned
American landings at Guadalcanal—the first of MacArthur’s
island-hopping offensives on the road to Tokyo; plans for
the counter-offensive over the Kokoda Trail in New Guinea.
Until MacArthur established his headquarters and became
organised, all war communiques were issued from the Prime
Minister’s office at Canberra, which imposed an additional
work burden and an additional responsibility.4

Of the events listed, Smith includes only those from the
Guadalcanal landings onwards. It seems very likely that
Smith may have taken over from another AUP journalist
whose records of the earlier briefings were not sent to the
proprietary or have not been preserved.

4 Ibid. pp. 77-78.
Format and frequency of the briefings

Don Whitington has set out the processes of the Curtin press briefings in some detail. The first press conference of the day was usually held about noon, designed to catch particularly the last editions of the evening newspapers in the capital cities. The next was about 5–6 pm, targeted at the morning newspapers and early-evening radio broadcasts. (Unfortunately, Smith does not indicate the times of the press conferences he reported. There is some evidence in his reports that he sometimes included material from two daily press conferences.)

Smith’s sequence includes only press briefings held in Parliament House, Canberra. It is clear from other accounts, particularly Whitington’s, that frequent briefings were held out of Canberra, particularly at the Australian military headquarters at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne, but also when senior journalists travelled with Curtin ‘on the road’. With Parliament sitting, Press Gallery journalists worked 12–14 hours a day, and when it was in recess War Cabinet met fortnightly in Melbourne, requiring journalists to travel to Melbourne to link up with the Prime Minister. Journalists often had to sit around for hours waiting for major announcements to materialise, such as General Gordon Bennett’s escape from Singapore.6

It is impossible to estimate the scope of these briefings outside Canberra or assess their content. The obvious explanation is that Smith’s brief did not permit him to travel outside of Canberra with Curtin, even to Melbourne, which was second only to Canberra in administrative importance during the Second World War. In the months when Allied Headquarters were in Melbourne it was probably more important than Canberra in a military sense. This factor partly explains the sometimes lengthy gaps in Smith’s briefings. Despite all these reservations, Smith’s sequence represents a superb record and, in all of the circumstances, we are fortunate to have it.

Other accounts of the briefings

A series of written reports by Melbourne Herald political correspondent Harold Cox to his boss, Sir Keith Murdoch, includes material from Curtin’s press briefings, as well as other political gleanings Cox picked up around the

5 Whitington, op. cit., p. 78

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parliamentary lobbies. However, the references to the briefings in Cox’s collection of reports to Murdoch do not begin until 1944, and most of them relate to briefings given by Curtin after he returned from London in June 1944. Cox also provides material from briefings held after Smith’s last report on 26 January 1945, including briefings on 2, 13 and 16 February 1945, and on 5 and 6 March 1945. Again, it is impossible to determine accurately when the last briefing was held, but the Cox reports suggest that it was early March 1945, perhaps even later. It is not known why Smith did not provide briefing notes of the final conferences recorded by Cox. This is important because there is an implication that Curtin was too ill to hold briefings by the end of January in the Smith account, while Cox indicates that they continued for at least five weeks, and possibly longer, after Smith’s transcripts cease.

Cox’s series provides an interesting parallel with Smith, although Cox’s notes are more selective and thematic than Smith’s straightforward chronicling. Where the two senior journalists deal with the same briefings, there is an impressive consistency in the way the two accounts match up. Where quotes are transcribed, there is virtually no difference in wording. Because Cox was not providing a complete record but largely picking the eyes out of briefings for his boss, he is sometimes more vigorous in his expression and choice of quotes, as in this extract from an Arthur Calwell press conference:

Mr Calwell remarked to Mr Knox, correspondent for the Sydney Telegraph, that if Mr Knox wished, he could tell Mr Brian Penton that even if Mr Penton came crawling to him on his greasy belly, he would in no circumstances authorise a visa for Mr Penton to go out of Australia as long as he continued Minister for Migration. He welcomed Mr Ross Gollan to the interview by taking exception to some paragraph in the Sydney Morning Herald which he construed as having praised him for a sensible decision by saying that in no circumstance did he wish to see himself praised by the Herald.

This extract confirms superbly Curtin’s quirkiness in appointing Calwell, an inveterate hater of the press, as Minister for Information! Cox is also more informative and descriptive about Curtin’s deteriorating health at his final briefings, a factor that Smith neglects, perhaps in a spirit of sympathetic deference.
I do not think myself when he resumed today that the PM looked nearly as well as I would have expected. I thought that his colour was bad, he seemed to be definitely listless and lacking energy and quite generally washed out. Altogether I was a little surprised that, on first impressions at least, he did not look more nearly normal ... I certainly gained the impression from the half-hour with him today that he is not by any means normal. He made a brief reference to his illness and said that it struck him very suddenly and unexpectedly. At one stage he did not expect to resume as PM but he was glad to be back and he intended to stay as long as possible. How long that might be he did not know.8

Apart from the reports of the briefings prepared by Smith, and the more discursive notes of Cox, other records of the briefings have not emerged. It is certain that other reports were taken. One of Smith's reports confirms that both Cox and Ewan Waterman of Murdoch's Melbourne Herald group had sent briefing notes to their offices. Curtin took issue with both journalists about the way in which material he had supplied confidentially had been fed to his political opponents in Adelaide. It is very likely that all senior journalists attending Curtin's press conferences supplied full briefing notes to their offices around Australia. Indeed, this is fundamentally what Curtin and Rodgers wanted them to do when they initiated the process.

It is at least possible that other series of these briefings are buried in newspaper archives, although, sadly, many of these have been dispersed or destroyed. For many years, the heads of service (or bureau chiefs) in Canberra were as much agents for their proprietaries as they were working journalists, and they reported extensively to their bosses in the manner of Smith and Cox. Even in the early 1960s, offices in the Press Gallery of the old Parliament House contained sacks of mouldering transcripts of ancient press conferences, many of them from the periods of the Curtin and Chifley governments. This invaluable material almost certainly has also been destroyed. It seems likely, therefore, that Smith's series published here is the only extant record of a substantial part of these remarkable episodes in political communication.

8 Ibid., 22 January 1945.
Editors' note
As Fred Smith notes in his introduction to the briefings, his reports were written immediately after John Curtin finished each press conference. Smith apologises for the quality of his typing. He was too modest. Although there are words and sentences crossed out, the professional quality of Smith's manuscript is good. In an era long before the word processor, the spell check and all of the paraphernalia of digitalised text production, there are virtually no typos or misspellings. Standards of punctuation and grammar are commensurate with what might be expected of a professional journalist in the great days of print journalism practice in the 1940s. While the prose is unpolished, it is straightforward, clear and syntactically appropriate. It is difficult to estimate how many duplications of these briefing notes Smith might have produced with the then standard technology of carbon copies. Certainly there are none of the problems of legibility, fading or traces of running dyes which rendered difficult the preservation of carbon copies. The briefings were typed on a standard-sized page similar to the contemporary A4 page. The formatting of the text is standardised throughout, with a HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL notation at the head of each page.

As Smith also points out, the briefings were reported at least 15 years before electronic recording devices were used extensively by journalists. Smith would have taken exhaustive notes in the briefings, recording Curtin verbatim in the important passages with one of the standard manual shorthand systems, probably Pitmans. The accuracy of his note-taking and the fluency of his transcription are evident in the quality of his manuscripts. Smith would have checked with his colleagues on the transcription of crucial passages, referring disagreements over wording or interpretation to Don Rodgers, or even to Curtin himself. There are occasional subheadings, but the bulk of the 63,000 words of text is presented without enhancement.

Editing of the manuscript for publication has closely followed the original formatting. The integrity of Smith's text has been preserved, including the occasional oddity or usage which seems slightly awry to contemporary eyes. In the interests of confining space, a number of Smith's paragraphs have been combined where they are devoted to the same subject.
The problem with Smith's manuscript has been the retention of a number of briefing notes which are unnumbered and, in some cases, undated. These notes have been inserted at appropriate points in the editing process where linkages can be established with adjacent material.

The inclusion of footnotes in the text is far from exhaustive. Our intention has been to provide information about people specifically mentioned in the text in the context of their wartime roles. Apart from dates of birth and death, career material unrelated to the Second World War has mostly been excluded. A few longer footnotes have been included about particular events where the editors considered that further elaboration was necessary. A chronology of events during the Second World War, both overseas and on the domestic front, has been interspersed with Curtin's briefings to provide relevance and context.
After the requirements of the armed forces had been met, the Australians had a [wartime] working force of slightly more than 2 million men. But from this group, ably directed by the Labor government of Prime Minister Curtin, the man I called 'the heart and soul of Australia', great things came.

General Douglas MacArthur

[Curtin's] was no role of a hero on a white charger, waving a sword and crying 'Onward!' at the head of a united nation. He had to be a contriver and he worried himself sick over the contrivances.

Paul Hasluck

You cannot plan wars in newspaper offices.

John Curtin
JOHN CURTIN'S WAR

Although incomparably Australia's greatest war leader, the only Prime Minister to parry a clear and present danger to the Australian continent, John Curtin's ascendancy has not always been verified by accurate perceptions of what he did and how he did it. General Douglas MacArthur's admiration for Curtin is attested to in his reminiscences where he accords Curtin a parity of leadership that he awarded to no other wartime leader, certainly not his own President:

[Curtin and I] promptly came to a sense of mutual trust, cooperation, and regard that was never once breached by word, thought or deed. He was the kind of a man the Australians called 'fair dinkum'. As I rose to leave, I put my arm about his strong shoulder. 'Mr Prime Minister,' I said, 'we two, you and I, will see this thing through together. We can do it and we will do it. You take care of the rear and I will handle the front.' He shook me by both my hands and said, 'I knew I was not wrong in selecting you as Supreme Commander.'

Even here, however, MacArthur's perception of Curtin is coloured by his own mystique and sense of destiny. In retrospect, Curtin had become just another MacArthur factotum, although a cherished one—another strand in the MacArthur legend. Although unstinting in his praise of the wartime support of the Australian community and labour force, MacArthur came only belatedly to value the quality of its front-line soldiers, whom he had disparaged initially as inadequate in the field or jungle, recruited from the slums of Australia, and lacking in fighting spirit. He similarly criticised the Australian commanders, except for Blamey, and resorted to elaborate stratagems to keep American soldiers from serving under them. Curtin's veneration for MacArthur was boundless, infusing his public speeches, his warm correspondence with the General and, in some degree, the off-the-record press conferences presented here. Whatever qualification may be placed on MacArthur's emphasis on a dual leadership in a strategic sense, there is no question that his epitomisation of Curtin's role as 'the heart and soul of Australia' was both genuine and justified.

Paul Hasluck is often grudging in his writings about Curtin's achievement as war leader, perhaps influenced

JOHN CURTIN’S WAR

by his status as an old friend and journalistic colleague in Perth. Yet after 40 years, his official history of Australia’s government and administration during the Second World War remains by far the most substantial account of the political and administrative aspects of Curtin’s leadership. While a reassessment is long overdue, Hasluck’s war history must be taken seriously, even though to contemporary eyes its judgements seem pervaded by subjective considerations, particularly his notions that Curtin tried to use the wartime emergency to secure social and political reform.

The apparent misgivings about Curtin’s reputation and performance are expressed more pungently in the posthumously published recollections of Hasluck, where he acknowledges Curtin’s dedication to his task, his nobility, and his continual growth in stature with the prime ministership. He is inclined to overstate, however, the extent to which Curtin relied on senior public servants, particularly Sir Frederick Shedden, and on his principal political lieutenant, Joseph Benedict Chifley. Furthermore, his emphasis on Curtin in scattered references through the text is more on the Prime Minister’s loneliness, his humiliations and his pervasive broodings and self-doubts. Undeniably, Curtin had these attributes but it does not give a balanced picture to single them out in the context of a vigorous, assertive and often inspirational war leadership.

The notion that Curtin had a wimpish side owes much to the retrospective image-making of his indefatigable press secretary, Don Rodgers, who was wedded firmly to the belief that Curtin largely gave up in the last months of the war and virtually willed his own death. Somewhat regrettablly, Rodgers’ assessment has been supported by Hasluck, probably because it reinforced his own tentative interpretation, and by the latest Curtin biographer, Geoffrey Serle, in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*. Whatever the merits of this reading of Curtin, there is little support in the material presented here. Apart from the inevitable ravages of what was then an almost inevitably fatal disease, there is no evidence that either Curtin’s intellectual powers or his leadership were dimmed by withdrawal or apathy over his final year. Indeed, there is much to suggest the contrary, particularly the transcript of Curtin’s enthralling briefing in July 1944, following his
return from London, in which he ranges in masterly fashion over the spectrum of global war and the war leaders.

Hasluck, however, does provide valuable insight into Curtin's conduct of the mechanics of wartime leadership, even though he fails to do justice to Curtin's qualities as an inspirational war leader in his dismissive rejection of any notion that he was 'a hero on a white charger, waving a sword and crying "Onward!" at the head of a united nation'. He is perfectly correct, though, in emphasising the lack of unity that Curtin had to counter; nevertheless he claims wrongly that the official parliamentary Opposition was the least of his worries. Even though the coalition of the United Australia Party and Country Party was in serious disarray, it remained a powerful political force which had been nudged out of government, rather than overwhelmed on the parliamentary floor, in October 1941. In Don Whitington's view, the coalition forces refused to accept that a Labor government could conduct a wartime administration when they themselves had failed. They remained supremely confident that they would win the 1943 elections, and although Curtin's triumph reduced the coalition's parliamentary effectiveness, the political leadership was far from quiescent through the remainder of the war, as these press briefings show.

The political opposition apart, Curtin's ingenuity, dexterity and resourcefulness were deployed constantly over more than 40 months of rigorous wartime administration in daily contacts with a host of political, military, administrative and community personalities and institutions. The factors that divided the community and diminished the war effort were quickly reflected in Curtin's own party. As Hasluck points out, Curtin was engaged in the constant practice of pretences, dissimulations, flatteries, balancing tricks and circumventing of opponents and critics. He was a contriver because he had no option but to be a contriver. He would not have been a successful war leader if he had not been able to contrive, improvise, temporise and, on occasions, to manipulate. To suggest, as Hasluck does, that Curtin worried himself sick over his contrivances is not warranted by the facts. Indeed, there is abundant evidence in his press briefings that he relished his

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contrivances and the points he scored over opponents. To suggest that he anguished about the realities of pragmatic wartime politics seriously underestimates the fibre and spirit of the man. Curtin was a superb political animal and he revelled in his politicking, as his sometimes idiosyncratic ministerial appointments confirm:

with a great smile [Curtin] said, 'I've given Calwell Information. He's been fighting with the newspapers all this time, now he can learn to live with them.'

'And,' he said, 'I've given Ward External Territories and Transport. The Japs have got the external territories and the Army's got the transport.' So with all the trouble Ward had caused him up to 1943, I think he had a pretty sweet revenge.

Dealing with the media

In no area, however, were Curtin’s tactical adroitness and control put to the test more consistently and intensively than in his daily dealings with the press. Throughout his prime ministership, Curtin was effectively the supreme propagandist of the Australian war effort, shouldering the burden for conceiving, coordinating, articulating and managing news and information policies in the interests of a sustained national war effort.

Before Curtin became Prime Minister in October 1941, other stratagems had been applied to achieve the direction of wartime news and information in a climate where silence and secrecy were often crucial to survival. It was essential to coordinate government news media policies so that, subject to the demands of military security, news about the war was filtered correctly to the Australian community and that press comment, particularly in editorials, was based on accurate intelligence. Under one of Curtin’s predecessors as Prime Minister, Robert Gordon Menzies, an attempt had been made to establish coherent public information policies and instil in the newspaper proprietaries an awareness of their paramount role in stimulating public morale and a dedicated war effort. This had largely failed because the government ineptly appointed as head of public information Keith Rupert Murdoch, managing director of the Melbourne Herald newspaper group and the nation’s most prominent press magnate. A newspaper proprietor
coordinating, inspiring and regulating the activities of other newspaper proprietors was theoretically a venture into irrationality, and so it proved. The attempt broke down in clamour over government partiality and Murdoch's unsuitability to guide his acrimonious peers. Inevitably, the public information politics of government intermingled with the demands of wartime censorship, not always administered with either finesse or sensitivity. Throughout the war, there were squabbles and rivalries between the central information agencies of government, particularly the Department of Information, and the public information units of the armed services, notably the Army. In such a tumult of contending news and propaganda interests, the formidable task of presenting the government's war direction fell back upon the Prime Minister, already burdened by heavy strategic and public policy responsibilities.

Prime Minister Menzies was rarely at ease in his relationships with the press and his distaste for journalists was ill-concealed. Furthermore, he had little feeling for political communication beyond the context of constitutional forms, particularly parliamentary processes. A political leader less suited to a rousing propaganda and morale-building effort in wartime, exploiting constructive, trusting relationships with print and newspaper journalists, could scarcely be envisaged. The bluff, hearty Arthur Fadden, who succeeded Menzies for a brief period,
was more communicative and got on well with journalists, but he lacked both the management and inspirational skills to conceive, coordinate and dramatise a stirring resistance to external threat.

This is where the saga of John Curtin's off-the-record wartime briefings to senior journalists begins, the era where he exulted in demonstrating that wars were not planned by newspapers.

**Curtin's off-the-record briefings**

The most important reason for publishing these press briefings is the unique perspective they provide of Curtin's prime ministership and his wartime administration. They reflect the evolution of the world's greatest war as it pervades the seething political and strategic consciousness of a great war leader. On a regular and systematic basis we see Curtin weighing up and assessing the ebb and flow of war, picking over the events of the day and probing their significance in the chain of grand strategy, commenting sardonically, even mordantly at times, on the foibles of the Allied leadership; comparing with bitterness what he interprets as the neglect of Australia and the South-West Pacific military zone in favour of more preferred war zones; turning a corrosive irony against what he calls 'weekending'—the frequent apathy and self-indulgence of the Australian community:

Curtin said he couldn't understand the mentality of Australian people. One day they were in a panic and the next they wanted more race meetings. He thought capricious newspaper leadership had a lot to do with it. When things looked bad in New Guinea, morale sagged; now things were better, everybody would probably want Christmas off.  

Perusing the briefings, the reader gets an uncanny feeling of knowing only as much as Curtin does at any particular stage. The options open to Curtin and his analytical processes are rendered tangible as the Prime Minister ponders and speculates, seeking the best solutions to what often seem insoluble problems.

As a former journalist and editor for industrial journals, and a long-term member of the Australian Journalists Association, Curtin prided himself on his associations with the press and his affinity with journalists. He recognised the practical and professional virtues of the methodology
put forward by Don Rodgers and he chose to implement it. Curtin utilised these press briefings to issue guidance on evolving war strategy, and to ensure that as far as possible government information was put before the press proprietaries in a manner conducive to sustaining the war effort and avoiding the spread of inaccurate information and damaging speculation. In particular, he sought the aid of the news media in influencing public opinion on the home front regarding several crucial issues—notably conscription and the use of militia forces, and the wartime complacency of the Australian people.
Curtin and the militia

During the First World War, the Australian Labor Party had split with rending bitterness over the attempts by its leader, and wartime Prime Minister, W.M. (Billy) Hughes, to introduce conscription of Australians for overseas service. John Curtin had been implacable in his resistance to conscription for overseas duty in the First World War, when he had been arrested and briefly imprisoned for failure to comply with compulsory enlistment procedures. Earlier in the war, Curtin had offered himself for active service and had been rejected, so his failure to go into camp was emphatically an assertion of principle. He was released from prison after the first national conscription referendum was defeated in 1916, but said later that his health had suffered from the confinement.9
From the declaration of the Second World War the Menzies and Fadden governments had made no attempt to introduce conscription for overseas service. Thus, the volunteers in the Army, Navy and Air Force who served overseas were distinguished from the Citizens Military Forces (militia forces) which had been called up and trained for overseas defence. This was the situation prevailing in December 1941 when war came to the Pacific. Militia forces as well as volunteers who had fought overseas were involved in the crucial fighting which stopped the Japanese along the Kokoda Trail in New Guinea, which was then Australian territory. These Australian troops fought under General Douglas MacArthur, Allied commander of the South-West Pacific area, whose boundaries extended well beyond Australian territory. (It was a constant irritation for Curtin during the war that New Zealand was not included in the South-West Pacific zone but in the Pacific zone, effectively separating it strategically from Australia.) Clearly, there were ambiguities in the principles and responsibilities of a Labor Prime Minister who was a conscription ‘jailbird’ in the previous world war.

Although Curtin’s non-Labor predecessors, Menzies and Fadden, had not pushed for legislated conscription, they found it an irresistible political weapon to direct at Curtin and his party still redolent with anti-conscription sentiment. (So much for Hasluck’s proposition that the formal Opposition was the least of Curtin’s wartime problems.) Curtin was well aware that any attempt to legislate compulsory military service beyond the Australian continent and its territories would bring him up against party
trditions, which he had fiercely striven to establish and protect. In these invidious ideological circumstances he moved at the routine ALP Federal Conference in November 1941 that the definition of ‘home defence’ be extended to include Australian territories within the South-West Pacific military zone. Against fierce resistance, including that of an astounded federal backbencher Arthur Calwell, who sought to block even discussion of the proposal, Curtin succeeded in calling a special Federal Conference for January 1942.

A few days after the conference on 20 November 1941 Curtin gave one of his more decisive, but risky, briefings. He wanted newspapers to avoid the fatal word ‘conscription’, preferring the less emotive designation of ‘one army’. Faced with the prospects of imminent invasion Curtin felt no compunction about throwing overboard the ideological baggage of an earlier war in Europe. He appealed through the bureau heads in Canberra to the newspaper managements around Australia not to tie up the immediate defence of Australia with the 1916 conscription issue. This, he said, would be a first-class way to kill the question. In effect, he delivered himself to the trust of the journalists in the room by telling them that the request for ‘one army’ had come from MacArthur who wanted the removal of impediments to the disposition of troops on the basis of volunteer and home service. Curtin did not want this information to be known publicly because ‘technically
[MacArthur] should have no concern with a political matter.

It was an audacious display of trust and breathtaking good faith in the journalists he was briefing directly and, with greater risk, in the executives to whom they reported, not all of them known intimately to Curtin. There would be speculation that Curtin was involved in seeking the aid of the media on the conscription issue, but to source the 'one army' proposal directly to the Prime Minister would leave him at the mercy of both the Opposition and the traditional anti-conscriptionists in the party. The Opposition would then exploit Curtin's inability to direct conscripts to New Guinea without the sanction of his party machine. Anti-conscriptionists in the Labor Party would excoriate him for abandoning such a basic and important principle.

Curtin's tactics worked superbly. The special Federal Conference gave him the result he needed by a comfortable majority. Neither the journalists nor management dobbed him in. It is easy enough to argue that this is media management, or even media manipulation in the cynical, exploitative sense of contemporary media practice. However, what sane political leader today could count on such fidelity to the off-the-record principle on such a matter of overriding importance? Or even on any lesser matter?

Curtin and the home front

In his official war history, The Government and the People, Paul Hasluck criticised, with circumspection, Curtin's 'season of austerity' theme in his speech of August 1942. Hasluck said that while Curtin brought an emotional warmth to the speech, he 'preached austerity as a good end in itself'.\(^\text{10}\) He analyses the language to suggest that, as a socialist, the Prime Minister had gone a little too far in his enthusiasm for austerity. In short, he was perhaps guilty of using the exigencies of war to espouse and promote a socialist austerity on dogmatic lines. Hasluck largely misses the point.

Curtin's comments to journalists over the three years of these briefings do not support any case that he saw austerity as an admirable end in its own right. When he is bitter about industrial upheaval on the coalfields, it is in a context of total war and very present danger. When he lets

off steam in the press briefings about labour inertia, even indolence, it is very much directed to the demands of a wartime economy. There are several caustic assessments of Australia's wartime spirit, or lack of it, through the briefings. These outbursts can be partly attributed to the darker, more pessimistic side of Curtin's complex personality. There is also a sense of frustration with what Curtin may have seen as his own inability to stir a greater effort from the Australian workforce at a time when its military resources were fully stretched. There are times when he seems to be counting every load of coal and every unit of industrial production:

In the meantime, there are buggers in Australia who won't work. Coal mines are idle, and everyone is thinking about holidays just at a time when a few extra tons in our war effort would have a crucial effect. We are like people who have got contagion out of the house and just over the back fence. Apparently we are not worrying how dirty the yard is.\(^ {11}\)

This is splendid rhetoric and no doubt there were moments of superb theatre at these briefings as Curtin lashed out at wartime complacency, apathy and listlessness. The recurring theme of the regulation of horse racing through the briefings has its amusing side, but it provides evidence of Curtin's insistence that popular diversions should not be regulated out of existence because of the war. There is a biting edge to Curtin's off-the-record observations about the Australian character which contrasts with his unerring ability to inspire and infuse patriotism into that same audience.

Curtin was also shrewd and perceptive to recognise Australia's role in the war once the great crises of 1942 had passed. By November 1943 he was telling journalists frankly that Australia had become the 'hewer of wood and carrier of water'.\(^ {12}\) By this he meant that Australia would focus on the supply role, particularly of food, leaving the fighting to others, principally the Americans. To support this view, he arranged for the Commonwealth Food Controller, J.F. Murphy, to brief journalists.\(^ {13}\) Murphy stressed that Australia was feeding not only the American forces but also the British Army and Navy forces in India. Inevitably, this had caused shortages for Australian consumption because, for example, Americans preferred beef to mutton and graziers were not killing sheep.
because of high wool prices. Curtin's qualities as an inspiring war leader have received richly merited praise. It is not generally recognised, however, that much of his leadership after the peaks of 1942 was exerted in a logistical supply era. Here the emphasis was less on sustaining direct military involvement but on the more mundane tasks of maintaining popular morale and domestic productivity through the long haul of supply and logistical support. These briefings provide valuable material for assessing this neglected side of Curtin's wartime prime ministership.

Despite his strictures about aspects of Australia's domestic response to total war, Curtin was intensely proud of Australia's achievement in providing the sinews of war, particularly munitions and aircraft. In July 1942, he told journalists that reports from the Director-General of Munitions, Essington Lewis, were 'nothing short of amazing'.¹⁴ (Compared with the total of 571,000 in the armed forces, 150,000 men and women were working in the munitions program.)

Curtin sometimes went too far in his effusions over war industry. In August 1942 he heaped praise upon the Boomerang, a new fighter which he said would eclipse the Japanese Zero. In practical terms, the Boomerang did not rate against the Zero and it was never used as a mainline fighter, although deployed in Army support later in the war. In December 1942 Curtin defended the Australian tank production program against alleged American comments that it was a 'joke'. He read

¹⁴ Briefing, 10 July 1942.
journalists a secret report claiming that Australian-made tanks were superior to Rommel's, and had the capability of mounting a 25-pounder gun. According to Curtin, production was already underway. In fact, only 58 tanks were completed, and none carried a 25-pounder gun. The project was cancelled in July 1943. Curtin's loyalty and confidence, however, were not misplaced with projects such as the successful production runs of Beaufort and Beaufighter planes in their hundreds, used extensively by the RAAF in the South-West Pacific theatre.

Some reference has already been made to Curtin's few asides that illuminate his relationships with his ministerial colleagues. The Prime Minister had no qualms about castigating Ward to journalists, but was guarded about Calwell, despite attempts by journalists to draw him out. There is a mild suggestion that the Deputy Prime Minister, Frank Forde, was indecisive, or at least reluctant to make decisions in the absence of his leader. The 'colourless' Arthur Drakeford and the dour John Dedman are defended for their competence, but only Chifley receives unstinted tribute.

There is a subtle but almost jocular subtext in occasional interchanges between Curtin and journalists about his most formidable party rival, Herbert Vere Evatt, the External Affairs Minister. Evatt also briefs the press at one meeting whose vainglorious tone contrasts sharply with the detachment of Curtin. Evatt wanted a national government and manoeuvred unsuccessfully to get one, against the wishes of Curtin and the majority of the Labor Party. The tensions between Curtin and Evatt emerged most patently in December 1942 when Curtin announced without warning that he would not form a national government and that he would proceed with a ban on domestic servants, which Evatt had resisted. There are other expressions of irritation:

When shown Evatt's statement, he said with some bitterness, 'It's a great world, isn't it?'\textsuperscript{15}

Curtin's banter with journalists, however, conveys a clear impression that mostly he had Evatt's measure and discounted his machinations.

It is worth noting that despite his strictures through the war against popular apathy and industrial problems in
sectors of wartime industry, Curtin also took a great pride in the national effort as reflected in its industrial achievement. Unquestionably, he saw in it the seeds of a rational and innovative post-war economy, an engine for progress that would avert the threats of the slumps and shortfalls that followed the First World War and cleared the way for the Great Depression. Regrettably, it was a vision of a post-war world that he was destined never to shape or share.

**Curtin, Churchill and Whitehall**

When Smith’s recording of Curtin’s briefings began in June 1942, relations with the United Kingdom were at a low ebb. In December 1941 Curtin had made his famous
declaration: '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.' According to Ross, this phrase was sent around the world as fast as the cable services could carry it and provoked strong reactions:

Churchill, then in Washington conferring with Roosevelt, wrote an angry letter to Curtin saying that such a statement would cause resentment throughout the Empire. He also wrote to [his deputy] Attlee in Britain, saying that such an attitude on the part of Australia would relieve Britain of some of its responsibility. President Roosevelt summoned Casey, the Australian Minister in Washington, and told him that if it was thought that this statement would ingratiate Australia with the United States, he assured him that it would have the opposite effect. It tasted of panic and disloyalty.16

Japan’s successful invasion of Malaya and the collapse of Singapore in the early months of 1942 had soured any sense in the Australian community that Curtin’s remarks were unfair. There was a pervasive feeling that Australia had been deceived and let down by the United Kingdom, particularly over the defence of Singapore.

Even earlier in the war, the relationships at the military level had often been strained. The debacle of British leaders

16 Ross, op. cit., p. 247.
in Greece and Crete, combined with a denial of independence and merited advancement to Australian commanders, had reinforced these attitudes. Curtin’s military advisers had been very much against Churchill’s attempts to divert the Australian 7th Division to Burma early in 1942. Churchill’s dislike of the Australian Labor government and its assertions of independence in determining Australia’s war policies was fanned by the despatches of the British High Commissioner, Sir Ronald Cross, who was close to Menzies and consistently predicted the downfall of Curtin’s government. Cross’s criticisms to London were not mere partisanship (he had been a conservative Member of Parliament, sent to Australia after he had failed as Minister for Shipping). When Curtin left Australia in 1944 for London, Cross described him to the Foreign Office as a man who had ‘found himself in the midst of events that dwarfed the little realm of his life’s thought, knowledge, experience and undertakings’, a comment which captures exquisitely simple-minded, stubborn British prejudice against the ‘colonials’.

All of this had been known but, until recently, it was not realised that Curtin’s decision to continue the appointment of Stanley Melbourne Bruce as Australian High Commissioner to Britain was not going to make Churchill any more accessible to Canberra. Bruce’s latest biographer, I.M. Cumpston, using Bruce’s papers and British documents, has shown the extent of Churchill’s detestation of Bruce. According to Cumpston, Bruce had the reputation of being an ‘arch-advocate of appeasement before the war and a busybody’. Cumpston also tells how Bruce frequently criticised Churchill for not running the war properly, and suggested that a new War Cabinet structure was needed to curb Churchill’s lack of consultation on wartime measures and policies. Curtin appeared to be unaware of these tensions and, after re-election in 1943, told a press conference that Bruce had been ‘a marvellous man in the job’ and would be reappointed. At the next briefing, he told reporters:

British prestige suffered a bad knock in the Far East. I not only regret that but I want to retrieve it ... The British Commonwealth of Nations has got to have economic strength as well as the unity which the throne symbolises. We have got to keep in mind all the time the sovereign symbol with autonomous rights.

Curtin’s invocation of the throne indicates a significant shift by his government towards Britain. In November 1943

19 Briefing, 6 September 1943.
20 Briefing, 7 September 1943.
Curtin expressed extreme indignation at the premature leaking of the Duke of Gloucester’s appointment as Governor-General of Australia, indicating that he knew the source had obtained the information in a ‘sneaky fashion’ because he had hoped ‘to get something from a section of the press, and he probably would’. The appointment of the Duke was a further manifestation of a resurgent pro-British spirit on the part of Curtin and his government.

By early 1944, discussions had begun about the composition of British forces to be transferred to the Pacific after the end of the war in Europe. At his wide-ranging, and decisive, press conference in July 1944 after returning from his visit to the United States and the United Kingdom, Curtin dismissed as ‘poppycock’ speculation that millions of British soldiers might come to Australia. There would be some infantry but the strong implication was that the units would be mainly Navy and Air Force. Clearly, a significant rapport had sprung up between Curtin and Churchill at the meetings in London. Not even MacArthur received the lavish praise that Curtin bestowed on Churchill at this press briefing:

He is the most important person arrayed against our enemies. He is indispensable because I do not know of any other equal who can replace him. He is an inspiration, a driver. He has the complete faith of the British people. He is the master of the House of Commons and no man has yet been its master.

As a distinguished leader of political labour, Curtin could offer no greater tribute than to say:

The British Labour men in the Cabinet have only one regret—they said he should not have accepted the leadership of the Conservative Party because he was not the leader of that party when they agreed to serve under him. However, these Labour men would see him through to the end of the war and they respected his promise that he would treat them fairly.

Personally, he had got on well with Churchill, who had ‘a great tiredness about him’, which he put down to anxiety about the second front: ‘Mr Churchill fires every shot and suffers every wound.’ Curtin had shifted a long way from Christmas 1941 when he moved Australia decisively towards the United States or from his criticism of the holding-war strategy in his Australia Day message of January 1943:

21 Briefing, 11 November 1943.  
22 Briefing, 3 July 1944.  
23 Ibid.
No single nation can afford to risk its future on the infallibility of one man, and no nation can afford to submerge the right of speaking for itself because of the assumed omniscience of another.24

Curtin’s references to other foreign policy matters in the briefings were relatively few. On Germany, he favoured unconditional surrender, but reacted coolly to proposals that Germany should be stripped of industrial capacity and partitioned. With some prescience, he hoped for the development of links between France and Germany ‘in the way of national homogeneity’. He was hard-headed about the USSR, praising the determination and spirit of sacrifice of the Russian people, but in the earlier briefings worrying that the Soviet Union would make a separate peace with Germany. He does not once refer to Stalin by name, nor does he project any naivety about the future, describing the three-power conference in Moscow in 1943 as a ‘sham’ and noting in October 1944 that the Russians were behaving ‘particularly badly’ in the Balkans and Bulgaria.

**Curtin, Roosevelt and Washington**

The establishment of Curtin’s warm relationship with MacArthur and its endurance through the war have been noted earlier. Curtin stressed in his public speeches that the Commander-in-Chief was a vital factor in all decisions about Australia taken on not only military lines, but also those of commerce, industry and economics:

> I am indebted to General MacArthur for the high statesmanship and breadth of world vision he has contributed to the discussion. The complete integration of our concepts, which has been a source of such strength in the past, will continue to the end.25

While MacArthur exploited to the hilt Curtin’s abundant praise in his reminiscences, the strength of the relationship is beyond question. With the possible exception of the exiled Philippines President, Manuel Quezon, Curtin was MacArthur’s staunchest political ally—linkages that MacArthur recollected with nostalgia in later years, recalling that both men had pledged to join him at the gates of Manila when it was liberated:

> But before we could liberate the Philippines, they were both in their graves.26

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Perhaps surprisingly, relatively little about the MacArthur–Curtin relationship emerges from the briefings. There is one recorded press briefing given by MacArthur which reflects the General's braggadocio, but is comparatively subdued and yields little insight into his relationship with Curtin, the tone of whose comments on MacArthur are mostly matter-of-fact throughout. Curtin seems to have saved his enthusiastic testimony for MacArthur to his public statements and personal correspondence with the General.

Curtin's relations with Washington were another story. Compared with Churchill and Whitehall, there is not a lot in the briefings about relations with Roosevelt and Washington. In particular, Curtin's visit to Washington and his discussions with Roosevelt are virtually neglected. With Roosevelt, there is none of the resonant and vivid sense of personality that Curtin deftly conveys in response to journalists' questions about Churchill. It would be foolish to make too much of this. Perhaps the journalists didn't ask the right questions. Perhaps the straightforward objectivity of Smith's reports doesn't capture all the nuances. It is undeniable, however, that apart from MacArthur, United States Ambassador Nelson Johnson and perhaps General George Kenney, Curtin is mostly negative about the American war leaders and their policies. Curtin may have looked to America without inhibition, but there is no evidence here that he did so with any enthusiasm. Evidence of indignation and grievance over military neglect and exposure to extreme peril are pervasive through many of the briefings. His response to Roosevelt's intention to appoint Flynn, the Democrats' 'Boss of the Bronx', as ambassador to Australia is etched in incredulous contempt. Even more revealing is his grim acknowledgement that if Roosevelt wanted to persist with the appointment, he would have to wear it.
It is significant that, through the briefings, Curtin does not bother to refer to the token Pacific War Council which was supposed to give Australia a voice in determination of Pacific war strategy and its oversight, but never did. Questions of military supply, particularly of aircraft for the RAAF and soldiers for MacArthur’s command, dictated

Like Stout Cortez
(When with eagle eyes he stared
at the Pacific)
‘It is too early in the piece yet to say that Mr Curtin has conquered America ... But ...’—Melbourne Argus
Cartoon by Norman Lindsay
Bulletin, 3 May 1944
Curtin’s attitudes and responses. In the first briefing recorded by Smith in June 1942, Curtin speaks of there being ‘a strong section in the United States which regards Australia as the “stepchild of the United Nations”’.

The core of Curtin’s grievance through 1942 against both of the great Allies was their ‘Europe first’ policy, determined in December 1941. When and how explicitly the policy was communicated to Australia remains questionable. Certainly, the grievance was shared, and probably fuelled, by MacArthur. By the time of the first briefing in mid-1942, the military advisers of both the United Kingdom and United States governments had concluded that Australia would not be invaded. Hindsight shows their judgement to have been essentially correct, but there must remain a healthy scepticism as to how this rationale was reached.

For the Australian Government and its advisers, there was every reason for believing, after the fall of Singapore, Malaya and the Philippines, in the fallibility of the supreme Allied leadership.

In July and August 1942, Australian military forces were fighting desperately at Milne Bay and on the Kokoda Trail. In September 1942 Sir Owen Dixon, Australia’s Minister in Washington, reported the Anglo-American decision to hold supplies to Australia at their present level for six months. Curtin read the messages from Churchill, Roosevelt and Dixon to the journalists but would not allow notes to be taken, a rare occurrence in the interplay between the Prime Minister and Canberra journalists. Roosevelt said explicitly that Australia should be able to hold out with what it had against any attack. Rejecting
the notion of any further appeal, Curtin said flatly, "I cannot moan to Roosevelt," thus neatly epitomising the spirit of Curtin’s attitude to the American leadership. He had no qualms about moaning to Churchill, and he did so repeatedly, because of the traditional relationship. Moaning to Roosevelt would have been futile, providing not even the solace of personal release or satisfaction.

After this *cri de coeur* Curtin does little to highlight relations with Washington. He talks of problems with lend-lease, reports pessimism about the quality of American war production, notes trade tensions between the United Kingdom and the United States, and is delighted when General George Kenney gets more planes for the South-West Pacific theatre. In February 1943 he makes the startling comment that if he could get £500,000 outside the budget he would spend it in America, presumably on influencing public opinion but 'not through the obvious propaganda channels'. Despite his acute awareness of the importance of American public opinion, he was dismissive of a projected conference of Pacific public opinion, probably calculating rightly that it would be a token similar to the Pacific War Council in Washington. Curtin’s last direct reference to Roosevelt was made in August 1944 when he told journalists that the United States had not made any approach on Roosevelt’s reported desire to obtain island bases from Australia, but there had been tentative discussions in Washington when he was there. It is a rather cool response to a major strategic issue. Twice in his final briefings, Curtin went out of his way to insist that Australia would not be pushed around by America in negotiations over a post-war civil aviation scheme.

Overall, the record revealed here is hardly indicative of the veneration and gratitude of an Australian Prime Minister for a great and powerful friend. At best, there is a sort of wearied resignation about what must be. At worst, there is a sardonic emphasis on motivations and outcomes that borders on contempt. Clearly, Curtin resented the manner in which he had been made to sweat it out at the height of the war.

28 Briefing, 21 September 1942.
Curtin and the Australian memory

Curtin is unquestionably the towering figure in what may be called Australia’s collective memory of the Second World War, to apply a currently fashionable methodology for historical analysis. In terms of historical record, presentation and interpretation, the Curtin legacy is comparatively meagre. There is one substantial biography of Curtin, written by his close colleague and friend Lloyd Ross. Ross began his work shortly after Curtin’s death, fired with the vision of getting it all down while the Curtin spirit and achievement still pervaded Australian politics and society, and while many of the former Prime Minister’s friends, associates and contemporaries were still alive. With the full cooperation of Curtin’s family, Ross assembled some superb material but other commitments supervened, and it was to be many years before Ross returned to the task. By then, most of the participants in the Curtin era including Curtin’s wife, Elsie, were dead, few leaving any relevant personal archives or documentation. Ross’s physical and intellectual powers were fading and, regrettably, he could not produce the noble portrait that he had envisaged.

It is uncertain whether Curtin ever maintained or stored any significant collection of personal papers. Certainly, Ross made some use of letters and other family documents supplied to him by Mrs Curtin when he began
his biography in 1946. Some reports suggest that Curtin's private papers were largely destroyed, as were those of Frank Anstey, his close friend and, in certain ways, political mentor over many years. It may also be that he lacked the bower-bird cast of mind that hoards every scrap of paper. It is tragically true however that, Chifley apart, Curtin left fewer personal papers than any other Australian Prime Minister.

The official records, of course, are extensive and Curtin's prime ministerial papers are maintained by the Australian Archives, but formal papers convey little sense of the wellsprings of personality, motivation and aspiration. There are glimpses of Curtin, sometimes vivid or incisive, in the papers of his colleagues, for example, in the substantial collection of Eric Tonkin, his private secretary for many years, held in the National Library's Manuscript Collection. Oral history accounts by politicians and public servants round out the portrait in some ways, particularly the account of his press secretary, Don Rodgers. According to Rodgers, Curtin habitually wore a stiff, high collar in his public speaking so that his neck was always tilted, pitched to the back of the hall.

As we have noted earlier, however, there must be some reservations about elements of what seems to be Rodgers' retrospective reinterpretation. Film and sound archives contain material evocative of Curtin's rhetorical, presentational and communicative skills, although the range is not as rich or diverse as might have been expected. Some interesting literary and media attempts have been made to represent Curtin, notably Thomas Keneally's novel *The Cut-Rate Kingdom* and David Williamson's script for the television series *The Last Bastion*, in which the Australian-born actor Michael Blakemore offered a plausible facsimile of Curtin.

In total, however, there is a lack of material that animates and vivifies Curtin; he remains too much the icon, the conventional man of marble. It is a modest objective in publishing these briefing notes to reanimate and revivify one of the greatest of Australia's Prime Ministers.

Clem Lloyd and Richard Hall
September 1997
Acknowledgements

Finally, it is important to acknowledge important assistance in compiling and editing Fred Smith’s manuscripts. Our principal debt is to his daughter, Mrs Carol Kirby, who graciously permitted publication of the material, and provided invaluable background material. The National Library of Australia recognised the value of Smith’s material, preserving and making it available to scholars for more than 20 years. It acceded enthusiastically to our suggestion that the transcripts should be published, and provided financial and logistical support for this volume which, of course, is published under its imprimatur. We thank particularly the Publications, Manuscript and Oral History sections of the Library for their inimitable assistance. Finally, we are particularly indebted to the Lloyd Ross Forum through Michael Easson, for providing financial assistance to the project at a crucial stage of its development.

Clem Lloyd and Richard Hall
Highly confidential

press briefings

June 1942–January 1945
INTRODUCTION

These notes of John Curtin's press conferences in Canberra cover 1942, 1943 and 1944—very difficult years, indeed, in the course of World War II. These conferences, very different from those of other Prime Ministers in this era, were initiated by Don Rodgers, an experienced journalist and press secretary to Curtin.

Curtin, a former journalist, cooperated fully. The press conferences gave him an opportunity to advance a 'spokesman's' influence in providing the media with an authentic narrative of the political side of the conduct of the war. From time to time he was critical of a wrong interpretation placed on events by the editorial policy of the media, including the possible misdirection of public opinion at a dangerous time in Australia's history.

I always felt that Curtin enjoyed these meetings. He was always relaxed, urbane and correct in his reception of the journalists. The conferences took place daily when Curtin was in Canberra almost invariably around noon. Often there was another meeting around 6 pm for the benefit of morning papers. Curtin treated the conference with quite reasonable frankness. He withheld very little of the then secret exchanges between his government and the Allied governments, reading telegrams and communiques in their entirety and communicating the advice and the views of world leaders with uninhibited frankness.

A reading of these notes will confirm this. He trusted the journalists implicitly and he was never betrayed by the disclosure of the more dangerous revelations of the time, for example, the progress of the 9th Division in their return voyage to Australia. However, the editorial writers used the information provided by their Canberra representatives in the interpretation of events in the
interests of general public knowledge of the progress of the war, and the duties imposed on Australians at home.

The press conferences commenced in 1942 and, at first, were confined largely to the heads of service in the Press Gallery. However, the attendance grew in numbers as the population of the Press Gallery increased over the war years. All the journalists looked forward to a Curtin press conference. It was a friendly event, unconfined by ceremony.

There were no tape recorders in those days. If there had been, they would have been enormously important to the history of the war. Written notes were taken by the journalists and these were typed out with minimum delay and communiqued to their offices. In my case, covering a large number of newspapers throughout the world with a basic parliamentary service, as manager of the Canberra Bureau of Australian United Press, meant my hurried return to my office after a press conference with the Prime Minister, and the typing of my notes while they and my memory were fresh. Not until my notes were typed—in considerable hurry, as evidenced by the poor quality of the typing—did I go home for lunch or dinner.

I can therefore confidently vouch for the quality of these notes.

Curtin frequently seemed weighed down by the enormity of some of his problems. He was a very serious-minded man, but he was always confident of his decisions and never gave the impression that grave decisions were beyond him.

F.T. Smith
6 March 1985
Chronology of Events

1939
26 April  Robert Menzies sworn in as Australian Prime Minister following death of Prime Minister Joseph Lyons on 7 April
1 September  Germany invades Poland
3 September  Great Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declare war on Germany
4 September  Australian Government orders German and Italian nationals living in Australia to internment camps
6 September  South Africa declares war on Germany
10 September  Opposition leader John Curtin announces that the Australian Labor Party will support the government’s war effort, but will not endorse sending conscripts overseas
12 September  Commonwealth Department of Information is established to assume responsibility for news and other wartime information, issuing a voluntary censorship code to print and broadcast media
15 September  Australian Government establishes a War Cabinet
17 September  Russia invades eastern Poland
19 September  Australian Government announces that 60,000 troops will be recruited and trained, 20,000 to make up a special overseas force under General Thomas Blamey
28 September  Poland is partitioned by Russia and Germany
20 October  Australian Government establishes compulsory military training for home defence, requiring every man turning 21 in the following 10 months to complete a three-month training program
29 October  Soviet troops enter Latvia
30 November  Russia invades Finland
14 December  Russia expelled from the League of Nations
17 December  Australia, New Zealand and Canada sign the Empire Air Training Agreement in Ottawa, to provide air pilot trainees for service with the RAF

1940
10 January  First convoy of Australian troops (6th Division) sails for the Middle East
11 February  German-Soviet trade agreement signed
15 February  Germany declares all British merchant ships will be treated as warships
29 February  Prime Minister Menzies announces Australian air strength to be increased by 1242 planes
6 March  Australian Government agrees to send a second division to serve overseas
12 March  Finland signs peace agreement with USSR
9 April  Germany invades Norway and Denmark
11 April  British troops land in Norway
3 May  Britain closes the Mediterranean Sea to shipping
9 May  First German bombing raids on British mainland
10 May  Germany invades Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg; Churchill becomes Britain's Prime Minister; British troops land in Iceland
11 May  First British bombing raids over Germany
3 June  Evacuation of Dunkirk completed—over 337,000 troops from Britain, France and Belgium are evacuated
8 June  Sir Keith Murdoch, a war correspondent in World War I, is appointed as Director-General of Information, responsible to the Prime Minister and with access to the War Cabinet—he holds the position for six months
10 June  Italy declares war on the Allies
11 June  Commonwealth Department of Munitions is established
14 June  German forces enter Paris
15 June  Australian Communist Party is declared an illegal organisation; Soviet troops enter Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia
16 June  Cabinet decides on a force of 250,000 men for home defence
18 June  Churchill emphasises determination of Britain and the Empire to 'continue struggle until final victory'
20 June  Australian Imperial Force (AIF) contingent arrives in England
22 June  France surrenders
24 June  Curtin approaches Menzies to set up an Advisory War Council
25 June  Hostilities cease between France, Germany and Italy
26 June  Australian Government implements special wartime powers to take control of Australia's resources, production and manpower
1 July  Wartime rationing of newsprint begins; Germany occupies Channel Islands
5 July  British bombers begin raids on cities in Germany
10 July  Battle of Britain begins; Luftwaffe attacks English Channel convoys
12 July  Menzies refuses establishment of War Council, proposes an all-party national government offering the ALP 5 or 6 seats out of 16; Curtin refuses
25 July  RAF completes 1000th large-scale raid over Germany in three months
4 August  Italians invade British Somaliland; large Libyan force threatens Egypt; food riots in occupied France and Belgium
7 August  AIF in action during Haifa air raid; Japanese move towards Indo-China
8 August  British troops advance in Abyssinia; 'Battle of Britain' begins
12 August  Italy threatens Greece
23 August  Campaigning begins at home for an early federal election (due in 1941)
24 August  Daylight air raids by German bombers centre on central London, night raids hit Bristol, Birmingham, Liverpool and south Wales

27 August  Factories in Italy are heavily damaged in RAF air raids

13 September  Italy invades Egypt

16 September  Roosevelt signs a conscription bill

21 September  Federal election; neither the Australian Labor Party nor the UAP-Country Party coalition gains a clear majority; Menzies continues as Prime Minister with the support of two Independents

27 September  Germany, Italy and Japan sign a 10-year military, political and economic pact; Nauru phosphate plant is shelled by German warships

1 October  Rationing is introduced for petrol (and will continue until February 1950)

28 October  Italy invades Greece; Advisory War Council established by Prime Minister Menzies with four Government members and four Opposition members

3 November  British troops land in Greece

9 December  Western Desert offensive begins

13 December  German troops move from Hungary into Romania

26 December  Charles Chauvel’s patriotic war movie Forty Thousand Horsemen premières in Sydney, assisting the war effort by raising wartime morale and helping to convince Australia’s allies of her commitment

1941

10 January  Heavy attacks on Malta

22 January  Australian troops enter Tobruk, Libya

24 January–May  Prime Minister Menzies in Britain for talks on Japan and the position in the Far East

6 February  Australian troops enter Benghazi, Libya

9 February  HMAS Sydney arrives in Sydney after one year’s war service in the Mediterranean

14 February  First German troops arrive in North Africa

18 February  Australian troops land in Singapore

27 February  Controls are introduced on newspaper production and newsprint imports

11 March  Lend-Lease Bill is signed by President Roosevelt authorising the US Government to help foreign governments with supplies of wartime goods and services, payment to be 'in kind or property or any other direct or indirect benefit'

6 April  Germany invades Greece and Yugoslavia

13 April  Soviet-Japanese pact of neutrality is signed

14 April  German attack on Tobruk is repulsed

10 May  British House of Commons is destroyed in an air raid
20 May Germany invades Crete

26–28 May Menzies renews offer to Curtin for an all-party national government; Curtin refuses

30 May British troops close in on Baghdad

2 June United States troops land in Iceland

8 June Allied forces enter Syria

18 June Turkey signs Treaty of Friendship with Germany

22 June Germany invades Russia

26 June Commonwealth Department of War Organisation of Industry is established

12 July Armistice in Syria

13 July Britain and Russia sign mutual assistance treaty

15 July Volunteer Defence Corps (VDC) is formed, with members comprising World War I ex-servicemen and other men aged between 40 and 60

16 July Australian troops enter Beirut

21 July Japanese occupy southern Indo-China; Britain and United States cease trade with Japan, impose economic sanctions

11 August Churchill and Roosevelt meet on board USS Augusta, and sign Atlantic Charter

25 August British and Russian troops enter Iran

29 August Menzies is replaced as Prime Minister by Arthur Fadden

1 September Armistice is signed in Iran

3 September German losses in Russia are estimated at 2 million

14 September RAF contingent arrives in Russia

25 September Germany attacks Crimea

28 September Delegates from Britain, Russia and the United States meet at Moscow conference

3 October Vote on government's budget is defeated with the support of the two Independents; Governor-General appoints John Curtin as Prime Minister-elect

7 October John Curtin and his ministry are sworn in by Governor-General

16 October Japanese Cabinet resigns

17 October Pro-German General Tojo becomes new Japanese Prime Minister and War Minister

19 October State of siege is proclaimed in Moscow

10 November Churchill announces RAF now equal in size to the Luftwaffe

12 November War Cabinet agrees to a United States request to upgrade air bases at Darwin, Townsville, Port Moresby and Noumea at US expense

18 November War Cabinet agrees to send reinforcements to Australian troops in the Middle East
19 November  HMAS Sydney is sunk by a German raider off the West Australian coast near Carnarvon—her entire crew of 645 officers and men is lost

26 November  Advisory War Council agrees with United States proposal to bring all Allied naval forces in the Far East and Pacific under unified command

6 December  Britain declares war on Finland, Romania and Hungary

7 December  Japanese attack Pearl Harbor, land in Malaya, invade Thailand, bomb Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines

8 December  United States, Britain and Australia declare war on Japan

9 December  Japanese invade Gilbert Islands, bomb Guam, occupy Bangkok; China declares war on Germany and Italy

10 December  HMS Repulse and HMS Prince of Wales are sunk by Japanese aircraft off Malaya; Japanese invade Guam

11 December  Germany and Italy declare war on the United States

16 December  Japanese land in British North Borneo

17 December  Japanese land in Sarawak

18 December  Australian and Dutch forces occupy Portuguese Timor

19 December  Japanese land on Hong Kong Island

22 December  United States troop ships start arriving in Brisbane; Japanese land in the Philippines

25 December  Hong Kong falls to the Japanese

26 December  Prime Minister Curtin says Australia now looks to the United States of America 'free of any pangs as to our traditional links of kinship with the United Kingdom'

1942

1 January  '26 Nations Pact' is signed in Washington

2 January  Japanese bomb Rabaul, New Britain

10–11 January  Japanese capture Dutch East Indies, burning oil wells and disabling refineries

12 January  Japanese capture Kuala Lumpur

23 January  Japanese capture Rabaul, threaten invasion of Australia

1–2 February  United States forces raid Japanese-held Marshall and Gilbert Islands, sinking 16 ships

3 February  Japanese bomb Port Moresby in New Guinea, and Burma

6 February  Roosevelt and Churchill appoint Combined Chiefs of Staff

8 February  Japanese invade Burma

8–9 February  Japanese occupy Amboina, Macassar, Singapore

10 February  First meeting of the Pacific War Council in London
15 February  British troops surrender in Singapore

17 February  Japanese occupy Palembang, Sumatra; an Allied Works Council is created by Cabinet to carry out the construction of defence and infrastructure works in Australia

19 February  Japanese invade Bali; Japanese bomb Darwin, bringing the war to mainland Australia for the first time, with fire power equal to that used to bomb Pearl Harbor—243 people are killed and over 300 injured, eight ships are sunk; National Security Regulations place restrictions on pay increases, except for cost-of-living adjustments to the basic wage, for the duration of the war

20 February  Japanese invade Portuguese Timor

23 February  Australian troops in Portuguese Timor surrender; mutual aid agreement is signed by the United States, Britain, Australia and New Zealand

24 February  Japanese submarine shells Californian coast

1 March  HMAS Perth is sunk in the Sunda Strait, killing 352 Australians

3 March  Japanese air raids on Broome and Wyndham, Western Australia

5 March  Conscription is extended in Britain to include men up to the age of 45

8 March  Japanese enter Rangoon, take Java, invade New Guinea, occupying Lae and Salamaua

9 March  Australian troops begin to arrive home from the Middle East

16–31 March  Japanese air raids continue on Darwin, also Broome, Wyndham, Derby and Katherine

17 March  General Douglas MacArthur arrives in Australia

26 March  General Blamey is appointed Commander-in-Chief of Australian Military Forces

27 March  Manufacture of a number of cosmetics is prohibited, including perfumes, eye make-up, nail lacquers, bath salts and beauty masks

31 March  British war expenditure reaches £4,776 million a year

4–9 April  Japanese raids on Ceylon

6 April  United States 41st Division arrives in Australia

9 April  United States forces surrender in Bataan

15 April  Australian-based bombers raid Japanese strongholds in the Philippines

18 April  General Headquarters for South-West Pacific Area is established in Melbourne; United States warplanes bomb Tokyo, Kobe, Yokohama and Nagoya

22 April  United States forces arrive in India

30 April  Japanese occupy Lashio on the Burma Road and enter Mandalay

2 May  Japanese reconnaissance planes fly over Townsville

5 May  Japanese move up the Burma Road and reach China

5–8 May  United States fleet wins Battle of the Coral Sea, forces Japan to withdraw

20 May  Allied troops withdraw from Burma
30 May  Japanese reconnaissance plane flies over Sydney Harbour at night
31 May  Three Japanese 'midget' submarines raid Sydney Harbour, torpedo naval depot ferry HMAS Kuttaral killing 21 men
3 June  Japanese invade Aleutian Islands
4-6 June  Japanese are defeated at Battle of Midway Island
7-8 June  Sydney and Newcastle are shelled from sea by Japanese submarines
11 June  Britain and Russia sign 20-year treaty
15 June  Clothing and footwear rationing by means of a coupon system is introduced
18 June  Churchill and Roosevelt hold talks in Washington
20 June  Vancouver Island, Canada, is shelled by a Japanese submarine
21 June  Germany captures Tobruk
30 June 1942

The Prime Minister is very angry over the reported statements in Washington by Messrs Hartnett\(^1\) and Wasserman\(^2\) describing Australia's war strength in over-optimistic terms.

Mr Curtin said that 'gasbags were — [expletive omitted from original] the United Nations'. Before he accepted the mission to America, Mr Hartnett assured Mr Curtin that his country came before his company—General Motors Holdens. He had gone to America to get those things which Australia could not supply herself with, including components of war equipment as well as complete items. Mr Curtin said: 'If we could get some Spitfires we could bash the enemy in New Guinea. The Spitfires could fly higher than the Zeros and force them down to the Kittyhawks which could deal with them.' The Prime Minister was not impressed by Wasserman when he was in Australia. He said he talked like a movie star, full of gestures and fine words.

Progressing from this point to the demands being made on Australian manpower, Mr Curtin paid a tribute to the work of Mr Dedman,\(^3\) a new Cabinet Minister and in fact a new Member of Parliament who had had the courage to 'wheel up' ideas for dealing with this difficult question.

Turning to the effect of rationalisation on newspapers, Mr Curtin said he would not listen to the proprietors until they stated the minimum requirements necessary for their business—not the requirements they would like to have. He had said that to the goldmining industry in his own State, and the manpower now engaged was sufficient only to keep the mines functioning.

Asked about the beer rationing question, Mr Curtin said the time was coming when, in the interests of a full war effort, the civilian population would have to do without a great many more things. It might come to a point of how many pounds of butter or how much meat could be provided for civilians. Manpower must be found for the war to the exclusion of other, less essential, needs. He believed it might be necessary to put such luxuries as tobacco, cosmetics, spirits and confectionery on one ration ticket, thus making it necessary for ticket holders to choose which of those luxuries they preferred.

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1. Laurence John Hartnett (1898–1986), Managing Director, General Motors-Holdens Ltd, 1934–47; Director, Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation, 1935–47; Director, Ordnance Production, Department of Munitions, 1940–45.
2. William Stix Wasserman (1901–79), Chief, United States lend-lease mission to Australia, 1942.
Mr Curtin was inclined to be pessimistic over the general situation. He had heard nothing from the Middle East. He is particularly concerned regarding the submissions made by General MacArthur relating to Australia's requirements. In view of statements published in America, including those of Wasserman and Hartnett, he fears that the feeling may get abroad in America that supplies which would have been sent to Australia could be better employed elsewhere. The government has been informed that there is a strong section in the United States which regards Australia as 'the stepchild of the United Nations'.

1 July 1942

In view of the German advance in the Middle East the Federal Government received a request from Great Britain that the delivery of three squadrons of Spitfires promised to Australia recently should be postponed. The Australian Government has agreed to this. The decision means that the Spitfires, representing 42 planes in all, will be unloaded at Freetown, Sierra Leone, assembled there and flown to the war area. However, replacements representing 15 aeroplanes a month, also personnel and spares, will come on to Australia. The Australian Government believes that at present the decision to divert the Spitfire squadrons will represent a month's delay in delivery to Australia, but if the war position continues to deteriorate, the delay may be longer. The government is anxious that the Japanese should not hear of the arrival of the Spitfires. It is hoped to surprise the Zeros in the first combat.

The Prime Minister is very disappointed over war events of the past fortnight. The Australian Government has been banking on the ordinary ebb and flow of war continuing, and the big reverse in the Middle East was unexpected. The setback is expected to have a very great effect on the global war and this may entail some sacrifices by Australia, and the taking of some more risks by Australia.

At their meeting in Washington, Messrs Roosevelt and Churchill had two main problems: (1) the Japanese
advance against Australia, which has been held up; (2) the German advance against Egypt, which so far has been successful. As Mr Curtin put it: 'Two men thousands of miles from here are inclined to think that Australia is in no great danger.' Mr Curtin said he had suffered bitter disappointment. He was now looking to a harder and longer war. He would have to commence his fight for strength in the Pacific all over again.

A possibility very much in the government's mind is that the Japanese, in view of the German success, may turn away from Siberia and resume the offensive against Burma. It would be a stupendous thing, said Mr Curtin, if Japanese gains in rubber, oil and other materials were joined with the immense technical capabilities of the Germans.

Mr Curtin revealed that, while in London, Dr Evatt discussed with M. Molotov the exchange of diplomatic representatives between Australia and the Soviet. It could be said that the question had become a more active one in both countries. Mr Curtin said he would, however, do nothing about lifting the ban on the Communist Party until the diplomatic negotiations had been completed. He agreed it would be foolish to maintain the ban on the party representative of the Soviet Government should there be an exchange of diplomats.
2 July 1942

Official reaction to the Middle East position is extremely gloomy. A government spokesman said that the situation had gravely deteriorated. A highly secret cable was received from Mr Bruce giving latest details from Egypt. He also was pessimistic. He did not think that any reliance could be placed on reports that Rommel, by the speed of his advance, had exhausted his forces or unduly lengthened the lines of his communications. He was now able, with comparative ease, to reinforce his army by the Mediterranean Sea route. There are strongest indications that the 9th Division AIF has left Syria for Egypt.

War Council yesterday was faced with two grave alternatives, both equally difficult to implement: (1) to reinforce the Middle East forces; (2) to evacuate them.

Mr Bruce believes that the enemy might attack Alexandria and Cairo simultaneously. Summing up, the government spokesman said the situation was ugly.

3 July 1942

The government has a report on Army manpower which involves use to better advantage of some of the manpower resources of the Army. The report, however, cannot be implemented until important changes projected in the Army are brought about. These involve the return of two Australian brigades from Ceylon to provide further stiffening of battle-seasoned troops. The number of divisions in Australia will be reduced by one or two and the number of mechanised divisions increased. It is proposed to take out of Port Moresby some of the less experienced troops rushed there in the first emergency, replacing them with more seasoned and better-trained men.

The government has not yet had any definite news from the Middle East. Newspaper reports suggest that the British line may hold at Elalem, and General Blamey thinks this will be so. General MacArthur cannot understand the British reverse. He says none of the excuses—poor equipment or poor leadership—are logical to him, but he cannot as yet express an opinion.
The first Bofors anti-aircraft gun, one of the most effective in the world, was produced by an Australian factory in the early hours of Thursday. These guns may soon be in mass production. Output of Beauforts [bombers] is still ahead of schedule.

6 July 1942. Tea rationing is introduced at the rate of two ounces per week.

7 July 1942

The 9th Division of the AIF is expected to be in action soon. Their location is at present highly secret. The government has arranged for a simultaneous release in London, Cairo and Australia when these men go into action. However, the announcement will not mention the 9th Division, but will say 'elements of the AIF'. A two-line cable from Mr Bruce describes the situation in the Middle East as 'slightly more encouraging'.

Mr Curtin thinks it unfortunate that Sir Keith Murdoch\(^{10}\) in the Melbourne Herald should advocate that the government should promise full rights of citizenship to all our allies. He points out that our allies include Chinese and other coloured people. At the present moment he is engaged in what he describes as a 'tulip dance' with Dr Hsu Mu\(^{11}\) on the rights of Chinese in Australia. As a result of this article he expects Dr Hsu to descend upon him with further demands.

Mr Curtin declines to comment on the Daily Telegraph agitation for higher soldiers' pay. He revealed that Army pay alone this year would cost no less than £90 million. He also asked pertinently whether newspaper editors also considered they should be brought down to soldiers' pay. He says he would like to increase soldiers' pay, but like the additional halfpenny on a packet of cigarettes, every shilling on a soldier's pay meant millions of pounds and it was impossible not only for Australia but for every government in wartime to make taxation and loans meet financial requirements.

\(^{10}\) Sir Keith Arthur Murdoch (1885–1952), Chairman of Directors, Herald and Weekly Times, Melbourne, 1942–52; Commonwealth Director-General of Information, June–December 1940.

\(^{11}\) Hsu Mu (born 1893), Minister for China to Australia, 1942–45.
In a long discussion on newspaper rationalisation, Mr Curtin said the proprietors had made no suggestion whatever at the first conference regarding the release of manpower. As a result, alternatives had to be put forward not as threats but to give a basis for discussion. According to Mr Curtin, the proprietors became hysterical. Their latest suggestion was that 800 men should be released from the industry. Mr Curtin said this was an excessive number and to accept it might be to benefit the strong members of the Australian Newspaper Proprietors Association to the disadvantage of the weak. He was sure the government would not accept the offer. It would mean a drastic curtailment of individual judgement of newspapers and news services. Mr Curtin said that all the alarums and excursions and campaigns had been without justification. He had insisted that the press should be left free. Great mistakes could be made by Cabinets and by military generals. Even if two-thirds of the criticism was 'bunk', its bad effect was compensated for by the one-third that was good. He agreed that competition amongst newspapers must continue. But the Production Executive never contemplated the strong papers surviving at the expense of the weak. It had produced alternatives only when it could not get a 'bloody' idea from the proprietors.

In this discussion Mr Curtin confirmed all that he has previously said about the necessity for a free press and the continuance of all newspapers. He said that newspaper staffs had been reduced by 30 per cent since the outbreak of war while newsprint had been cut 68 per cent. It was pointed out to him that the proprietors themselves had initiated the newsprint plan but Mr Curtin pointed to the necessity of protecting the weak as well as the strong in this matter. He was particularly emphatic on this idea of protecting the weak and when somebody suggested to him that the proprietors had two years' supply of paper at least, he asked: 'Is that the big fellows? What would they say to pooling the paper?'

Summed up, my impression of this discussion is that the government was surprised at the stand taken by the newspaper proprietors and is wondering why they fell into what one Minister described as 'a panic'.

12 The Production Executive was a subcommittee of Cabinet which dealt with economic matters.
There are now 76 Beaufort bombers in operation. This is considered to be a fine achievement because Australia had been thrown back on her own manufacturing resources when England cut off aircraft supplies to this country. Engineers are still trying to improve the machine to make it effective as a dive bomber. Work on all-angle fire power is another improvement they are carrying out. It is expected that the new Boomerang fighter will be ready for action by the end of the year. This, it is anticipated, will be superior to the Zero and equal to the Spitfire. The government has the highest hopes for its success.

10 July 1942

A report submitted to the War Council yesterday by the Director-General of Munitions, Mr Essington Lewis, relating to the progress of the munitions industry was, in the words of the Prime Minister, nothing short of amazing. We are now on the verge of producing tanks more efficient than those of the United States in Australia and those of the British in the Middle East, and better than those of Rommel. They are a combination of British and American designs with Australian modifications and a revolutionary fabricating process by which most of the chassis is cast in one operation instead of consisting of
a large number of riveted parts. Production of the tanks should commence shortly.

The first of the Bofors anti-aircraft guns are now coming out of the factories. Australian ingenuity has managed to manufacture one important component of the gun in one operation instead of 27 in English factories and 33 in the United States. This will speed up production. We are now producing 8000 million rounds of small ammunition a year, which is staggering compared with our pre-war production. Next Thursday the War Council will have before it a £25 million program for the building of Beaufort bombers.

Discussing manpower problems Mr Curtin said there were now 571,000 men in the Australian forces excluding casualties and 150,000 in the munitions program. This made virtually 750,000 men engaged in the war, a very considerable contribution from a nation of Australia’s population. Additional men added to this number would have to come from civil industry, so that further expansion of the men in the forces and in war industry would mean a progressive diminution of civil amenities.

The government is convinced that reports that there is an abundance of women available for war work have not been borne out. Many women are already engaged in industry, but the government would not consider the conscription of women. A wide call-up of women would take women out of the domestic field with consequent lessening of the efficiency of the male worker.

Turning again to the newspaper angle, Mr Curtin said he had told the Production Executive that in his opinion the employers’ offer of another 800 men from the industry might mean that some papers would have to close and he did not agree with this. He said the decision was now one for the Production Executive. Mr Curtin said that the contribution in manpower which the newspaper industry could now make would not have a great effect on the war effort.
In answer to a question he said that more men must be recruited for the Navy.

Keep a picture handy of the United States Vultee Vengeance fighter. These will be in the Australian news shortly.

The Federal Government has agreed to arrangements with Japan for the exchange of diplomatic representatives at Mozambique, West Africa. The exchange so far includes Australian legation staff at Tokyo and the Japanese diplomatic staffs in Australia.

Ross, the Australian representative in Timor, is reported to have escaped from the Japanese and the government is hoping to hear that he got away. It is reported that the Japanese sent him with a message demanding the surrender of Australian forces in Timor, and that he took the opportunity of escaping.

Bowden, the Australian representative at Singapore, cannot be located. The government does not know whether he has escaped or is dead.

14 July 1942

Mr Curtin said he had received a report from the Middle East that the elements of the AIF which have been in action had made an excellent showing. This had also been the case with the troops with which the AIF were cooperating. The enemy had to resort to heavy dive-bombing and their counter-attacks were unsuccessful. Rommel had been thrown back but it was too early to talk about this movement. The report indicated very capable opposition to Rommel.

Dealing with the Russian front, Mr Curtin said there were two sides to the situation. The Germans were within a few miles of their position at this time last year and it now all depended on how the Germans and Russians were able to throw in their forces. The question was not whether Germany could not push on, but rather the way the Russians held together even if they had to yield territory. While Russian armies were capable of fighting, Germany would still have to continue fighting in that theatre.

Woman university graduates and students volunteered for war industry work, 1942
Album 613
Pictorial Collection
National Library of Australia
Mr Curtin said information he had received showed that the Russians had been increasingly subjected to pressure, which was not lessening. Asked if the Russians were better equipped to stand up to this pressure, the Prime Minister said it was a difficult question to reply to because everything depended on the strength of the enemy.

Summed up, the present position was that the British thought they could hold Alexandria and this would obviate the French fleet anchored there becoming an issue. Mr Curtin said he believed we had very strong reinforcements in Egypt. He knew that these reinforcements had been going around the Cape of Good Hope for a considerable time. Mr Curtin's demeanour throughout the interview was encouraging.

He said it had been learned that the Australian representative in Timor, Ross, had arrived back in Australia and had conferred with Blamey. His return must be kept secret because of possible Japanese reprisals. Ross, he said, could be accused by the Japanese of having been a little ambiguous with them. The Japanese apparently had the impression he was prepared to be a ready tool in securing the capitulation of forces on the island, but he was not. Another important aspect involved military considerations. Ross could not have got away but for the fact that we had established and were maintaining communications with the forces in Timor. We did not want the Japanese in a fit of anger or resentment to concentrate sufficiently quickly to clear our forces out of Timor. We wanted to maintain our forces but the Ross escape was the kind of incident which might cause them to be pushed out. So there must be no reference of any kind to Ross.

Mr Curtin's attention was drawn to statements by South Australian Premier Playford and Coal Commissioner Mighell on the coal position. Playford protested about the lack of coal stocks in South Australia and Mighell is supposed to have said that coal production in New South Wales had fallen below consumption point. Mr Curtin dismissed Playford's complaint. 'I know where I stand on coal,' said Mr Curtin. 'One of these days when someone cracks me about coal, I will tell him the present position and the coal figure when we came into office.'
Mr Curtin had a lot to say today about the coal position.

Referring again to Mr Playford’s complaint, he said that when the Labor government took office, South Australia was carrying less than 200,000 tons of coal. The highest point to which the Federal Government had been able to raise this had been 230,000 tons. Up to the end of May it had succeeded in maintaining 200,000 tons in South Australia, but owing to convoy requirements and losses of ships there had been a falling off of deliveries, and now South Australia had about 170,000 tons.

Mr Curtin said the conditioning factor in supplying coal was the shipping position. Space to ship 60,000 tons a week from Newcastle was necessary but in the last six weeks it had not been possible to provide this space. Expansion of industry had brought about greater coal consumption and lessened stocks in hand. Mr Curtin had a discussion with the shipping control authorities, including those with authority over overseas ships, in an effort to obtain more tonnage.

New South Wales stocks have been above one million tons since the beginning of May and are increasing from week to week. This represents about 100,000 tons more than customary stocks. The present stock is 1,063,000 tons.
Mr Curtin said that, even if all mines had worked, it would not have been possible to shift all the coal produced. The railways were being used to shift as much as possible but difficulties were also great here. The government had managed to get a number of small parcels of coal to New Zealand on ships using that route. It was put to Mr Curtin that this explanation discounted Mr Mighell’s contention that production was not keeping pace with demand. Mr Curtin agreed and repeated that the main factor at present was lack of shipping.

Advice to the government today revealed that the enemy had counter-attacked in Egypt but had been repulsed by the AIF. His information was that Rommel was hesitating.
On Russia, two main viewpoints had been put to the Australian Government: (1) The Russian Army is still intact, broadly speaking, and is adopting a policy of holding the Army while giving ground and preserving offensive assets until winter. At the same time terrific losses were being imposed on the enemy. (2) The loss of terrain is serious in that it opens the way to the Caucasus. Information from Russia is at present too confused to enable these two viewpoints to be separated with any reliability.

Later:
Mr Curtin was asked to comment on a critical statement by Fadden on the coal stoppages. He was asked to release for publication a few of the above points which he gave 'off the record'. He declined because he said that while shipping was the main difficulty, he did not want to encourage the miners to believe they could stop work and get away with it. He said he was getting 'heartbroken' over the coal position and he was doing some careful thinking which might take him 'a couple of days'. He referred to a stoppage today which was apparently so trivial that the mine officials were unable to enlighten the management on the trouble. 'I think the position is getting pretty shocking,' said Mr Curtin.

16 July 1942

Mr D. Ross, formerly Australian representative in Timor, unexpectedly arrived in Canberra today. In an 'off-the-record' interview of half an hour he told of his escape from Timor. He stressed the need for the most careful safeguards to prevent his story reaching unauthorised hands as the fate of Australians still in Timor is involved.

The principal point stressed by Mr Ross was the splendid morale of the 450 Australian troops still living in the hills of Timor and harassing the Japanese with guerilla tactics. Some had been stricken at first by malaria but all were now in good health. Their ammunition was intact, their food plentiful and their only fear was that the Japanese might send in large bodies of troops to drive them out. Ross admitted that a small ship could take the men off the island but he questioned whether this would
serve any purpose. From his observation the whole of the East Indies was only lightly held by the Japanese who had transferred their large forces elsewhere. The Australians remaining in Timor might one day constitute a valuable force. They were in constant touch with Australia by a wireless set which they had taken from Dili. They had even had one delivery of mail.

On the night of 19 February the Japanese bombarded Dili from two destroyers off the coast, then landed about 4000 troops a few miles to the west of Dili. About 500 to 1000 men were sent up the river to prevent any retreat from the city. Our forces there comprised one company of Australians and about 600 Dutch native troops. They camped near the aerodrome but about 60 per cent of the force was struck down by malaria and the commanding officer decided to move to a point 12 miles from Dili. One section only was left at the aerodrome.

When the Japanese attacked, the section at the aerodrome put up a fine show but it is not known how many Japanese were killed. According to Ross the enemy advanced like fanatics, hurling hand grenades. It was not possible to hold the 1000 to 2000 Japanese which comprised this force, so the Australians blew up the aerodrome which had been mined and raced 700 yards over open country without suffering a casualty. In the early part of the action our casualties were one killed and two wounded.

In the meantime, the Dutch had left Dili mainly because all their ammunition had been transferred elsewhere. Mr Ross said the Japanese had asked him where the ammunition was, and he replied, 'where the honourable gentlemen were being evacuated'. The Japanese then discovered there were no Australians in the place, so they started a three-pronged drive. Eventually the net closed and, when it did, all they found was two dead Australians. That was three or four months ago. Since then our forces had been in the hills with ample ammunition and every time the Japanese went out they were ambushed. The Japanese held Dili while our men had the rest of the island to themselves. In the past three months Ross said casualties had been 250 Japanese killed and one Australian wounded.

Discussing his personal experiences, Mr Ross said that he was not under any Japanese military command, but
was dealt with by the Japanese Consul who suggested to him that the Australians had been driven back into the mountains and probably were in a fairly bad condition. The consul said the Australians might consider it worthwhile surrendering. Mr Ross conveyed this message to the Australians but, as he expected, they refused to surrender—with picturesque expletive.

Mr Ross then learned of an unfortunate incident which affected some of his future activities. Headquarters of the Australians kept in touch with the men guarding the aerodrome by means of flash lamps in daytime, but one morning it was misty and the lamps could not be used. So headquarters decided to send down a truck with 16 troops. It was proceeding along the beach when it ran into the Japanese, who stopped the truck and disarmed the men. Four were taken from the vehicle and four Japs put in to escort the prisoners to Dili. The four men with hands tied behind their backs were ordered to march along the road and were doing so when long-range machine-gun fire was heard. They and their escort took cover in a ditch, and when firing ceased rose to retrace their steps. They had covered only a few yards when one of the four looked back and saw the Japanese guard levelling rifles at them. The volley killed three and hit the fourth Australian in the neck. He tried to rise but was bayoneted. As he lay on the ground his watch was stolen. He was left for dead but natives found him and revived him. He told Ross of the fate of his companions. The 12 men in the truck had not reached Dili and nothing since had been heard of them.

Treatment of the prisoners depended on the army commander, said Ross. Some were like madmen, but others treated prisoners well. This was admitted by the Japanese Consul to whom Ross complained about the killing of the Australian prisoners.

There was a change of consuls and Consul Saita from Spain took custody of Mr Ross, who was informed that on humanitarian grounds it might be advisable again to appeal to the Australians to surrender. Mr Ross said he would not have anything to do with the suggestion because of the killing of the Australian prisoners. The Japanese army commander also put the same suggestion and, at Ross's request, provided a written guarantee that the Australians would be well treated if they surrendered.
The Japanese commander expressed a high opinion of the Australian fighting ability.

Mr Ross agreed to see the Australian commander again. The Japanese commander also asked him to convey a message that in his opinion the Australians had done their duty thoroughly and had proved themselves good soldiers. Mr Ross set out, met the Australians but told them not to surrender. He said he had had enough of the Japanese and was not going to return. He escaped by motor boat to Australia.

Lieutenant Colonel Spence is in charge of the Australians in Timor. Mr Ross believes that the friendliness of the natives has been a great factor in the success of the Australians in holding on. For seven months the natives had fed them and every Australian had a native batman. In Dutch Timor, however, the natives were aiding the Japanese. Commenting on his escape Mr Ross said he was not regarded as a prize by the Japanese. His detention was purely political. They kept a tight rein on him because they did not want him to be able to provide information concerning the Japanese.

The Japanese might not yet know that Ross has reached Australia. The government wants to avoid information leaking out at all costs because the Japanese might then send in a large force and wipe out the Australians.

17 July 1942

General MacArthur visited Canberra today for a conference with Mr Curtin. There was no special significance in the meeting and no major move is foreshadowed. MacArthur gave a brief ‘off-the-record’ interview in which he expressed several interesting points of view.

He said that in the last six months Australia had strengthened her position immeasurably. There was a large number of fighting men in the Commonwealth who, with a little more training to season them, would make a powerful fighting force. Equipment was coming to Australia in considerable quantity and he was satisfied with the progress being made. He said there were no
considerable units of the Japanese fleet south of the Carolines but there was evidence that the Japanese were 'working like beavers' to consolidate their positions in the islands to the north of Australia. At the same time we were using the respite to 'work like beavers' too and we had done very well. He would like to see a million men in Australia ready to launch an attack on the Japanese.

He could see no immediate prospect of a second front in Europe. This would be a very dangerous and costly operation. Therefore it would be logical to use Australia as the springboard for an offensive to join up with the Russians or the Chinese or to link with Allied forces in India. There was evidence that the Japanese were taking considerable forces, particularly air strength, from the northern islands but whether this presaged an attack on Russia he could not say. He thought that an attack on Siberia would be very dangerous to the Russians in view of Japanese strength.

MacArthur expressed the view that, but for the successes of the Allies in the Coral Sea and Midway battles, we would by now have been fighting the enemy on our own soil. The Japanese lost these battles not through inferior equipment but because they overstretched themselves and brought their fleet units too far forward without the usual air umbrella. This enabled land-based aircraft of the Allies to batter the enemy fleet.

MacArthur said that the Pacific supply route was the only one that was really safe. The Allies were losing the convoy battle in other parts and Great Britain was now a beleaguered island. Therefore, he repeated, he would like to have men and material at his disposal to attack the enemy from Australia. However, higher strategic decisions did not rest with him. He expressed great satisfaction with Australia's munitions effort and said we should never let the industrial potential die down, but should use it after the war to provide arms with which to defend ourselves unaided if necessary.

Turning briefly to Russia, he said that while the Russian armies remained intact, it did not greatly matter whether they were in front of or behind Moscow or Leningrad. It appeared that neither side had sufficient military weight at present to force a decision. It also seemed that neither could achieve the necessary
concentration for three months at least. 'Either I crack them or they can crack me. It can’t continue.’

Mr Curtin heard a rumour which he is trying to confirm that the High Court will not now deliver judgement in the uniform tax case until 28 July in Brisbane. He is very disturbed about this because the government’s entire financial program will be held up. The government will be unable to complete its budget and it will be obliged to inconvenience thousands of taxpayers who are awaiting information on their tax liabilities this year. The short paragraph sent today was written on his suggestion to try and hurry up the Court. Mr Curtin was seriously concerned over the suggestion that the Court is now on vacation while such a vital judgement is pending. However, he is trying to obtain further information.

The Minister for the Army, Mr Forde, and the Minister for Information, Senator Ashley, raised the question of the Army Public Relations Department at the War Cabinet today. They both had proposals on the subject but Mr Curtin said their proposals were not yet in a conclusive stage and they had been asked to prepare a detailed agendum on the subject for consideration by War Cabinet shortly.

18 July 1942

Mr Curtin explained the reason for the censorship ban on mention of the refusal of the Newcastle seamen to take un convoyed ships to sea. He said this action had not been taken to stifle comment. He sympathised with the seamen, but the fact was the ships that would normally be used to protect convoys were now being diverted to something else. There must be no discussion of the fact that convoys were unprotected because the enemy would seek the reason for the diversion of naval vessels. The fact was that Navy vessels were being assembled. There must be no discussion or hint of this fact for obvious reasons. Mr Curtin gave no reason for the assembly of the naval vessels, but it is assumed that some important though not major operation is pending.

Mr Curtin is angry with Mr Ward’s embarrassing statements in public speeches at various towns along the
route of his present tour. He described his Labour Minister as a 'bloody ratbag', but indicated he could not disturb national harmony by a controversy with him. Mr Curtin, for publication, said that he had contacted Ward on Fadden's disclosure of his public criticism of government policy, and Ward replied that he had been misreported. The report in question was published in the *Mildura Daily* and was reported by a competent Melbourne journalist. Mr Curtin said that Mr Ward's excuse reflected unwarranted discredit on a provincial newspaper. In his telegram to Mr Ward, the Prime Minister directed him to return immediately to Canberra for consultation if the report was correct.

There is something serious brewing in manpower circles over Ward's embarrassing tactics. It is said that manpower officials are resentful of Ward's criticisms and veiled attacks. One rumour says that Wurth himself is on the point of resignation but this lacks confirmation, although I am convinced there is something in it.

21 July 1942  Japanese invade Papua at Buna

23 July 1942  High Court delivers its judgement on the uniform tax issue upholding the validity of Acts passed by the government to replace separate State and federal income taxes with a uniform income tax throughout the country
23 July 1942

Mr Curtin foreshadowed an important reorganisation of Army commands in the near future. He hinted that Brigadier ‘Red’ Robertson, who organised our armoured division, would be given increased responsibility. The government considers that Robertson has done a remarkable job. Mr Curtin also hinted at the possibility of the organising of another armoured division.

He declined to state the substance of his conference with MacArthur in Sydney but, from hints which he gave, a big move is now possible. This may be linked with the Japanese concentrations to the north and the landing at Buna. He was more troubled in his demeanour than he has been for some days. He is particularly worried over the shipping position, but he did not refer to the reported loss of ships off the New South Wales coast hinted at in a censorship order. However, from another source, it was learned that one of the ships sunk was a Greek vessel which was torpedoed off Jervis Bay a few days ago. She carried a number of military personnel, none of whom was lost. However, there were 101 military vehicles on the ship when she went down.

In his ‘off-the-record’ talks and in his public statements Mr Curtin is hammering at the necessity to strike the Japanese hard. In this he is being aided by MacArthur behind the scenes. Curtin said tonight that he would be willing to take risks with Australia to drive the Japanese out of the war. The logical route to reinforce Russia was by the short North Pacific route which would not be safe while Japan was in the war. He revealed that of the last convoy sent from England with British and American material for Russia three-fifths was lost, a very great increase in the proportion of loss compared with the previous convoy. He said the best way to help Russia would be to fight Japan hard, and enable Russia to take away from Siberia some of the troops and material which Japan was now immobilising there.

From a Canberra source I learn that the ‘off-the-record’ talk by MacArthur in Melbourne on Sunday was on exactly similar lines to that which I recounted after his visit to Canberra last week. In Melbourne, he elaborated on his views on the ‘second front’ which he stated in less detail in Canberra.
Later:
Referring again to the Army reorganisation, Mr Curtin emphasised that the position of General Blamey would not be affected. He hinted that MacArthur had expressed some admiration for Blamey's military viewpoint. He praised his organisation of the evacuation of Greece as one of the most outstanding events of the war, greater even than Dunkirk where the evacuating troops had the protection of almost unlimited aeroplanes. Mr Curtin indicated in a roundabout way that Blamey's private life had nothing to do with his military office. He said when Blamey was appointed the government was seeking a military leader, not a Sunday School teacher.

27 July 1942 Australian Women's Land Army is established under the Director-General of Manpower to aid primary production, especially growing of fruit, vegetables and cotton, dairying and poultry farming. Controls for simplified clothing manufacture are announced under the style of 'Fashions for Victory'—men's suits must not be double-breasted, not have vests, buttons on the sleeves, or cuffs on sleeves or on trousers; prohibitions on female apparel are for evening wear, hostess gowns and children's party frocks; dry cleaners are prohibited from cleaning certain classes of garments including dinner jackets and evening dresses.
27 July 1942

The government believes that the raids on Townsville and Darwin—there was a second raid on Darwin last night—are intended by the Japanese to divert attention from an imminent Allied attack of which the Japanese have gained some prior knowledge.

Mr Curtin declined to comment on newspaper reports that there was no fighter protection at Townsville, but he asked questioners whether the fact that the Japanese dropped their bombs harmlessly in the harbour did not have some significance. He left the impression that the Japanese were intercepted from a point other than Townsville. The raid was carried out by three flying boats which had come from the Solomons.

This impending operation links up with the trouble at Newcastle last week when seamen refused to take ships to sea without a convoy. The protecting vessels had been removed to enable them to assemble for the Solomons operation.

The background of the Newcastle incident is as follows: The captains of the vessels concerned called the crews together and told them of the risk they were taking in going to sea unconvoyed, and the seamen thereupon declined to man the ships. Curtin called the Maritime Transport Council together and this body unanimously carried a resolution instructing the men to man the ships and take them to sea without convoys. That same night submarines torpedoed two ships off Jervis Bay. The Navy thereupon announced the re-establishment of convoys. The Maritime Transport Council conveyed to Curtin the view that an awkward situation had been created for it, because events had proved the recalcitrant seamen had been right in their attitude. Mr Curtin said that neither the Navy nor the Maritime Transport Council had been to blame. The government had no desire to risk the lives of the seamen and in addition had no wish to risk ships.

This morning word has been received from the British Government of the extremely grave shipping situation as the result of losses. The Australian Government is very worried over this situation which hampers an operation which might be desirable in this zone.
Mr Curtin said that Watkins MHR\textsuperscript{25} had put in a lot of good work on the Newcastle affair, and the developments had made him 'look a bit of a goat'.

Two brigades of Australian troops which were stationed in Ceylon are due in Fremantle within a day or two. So seriously does the government view the submarine menace, and the possibility that their arrival might attract an enemy attack on Fremantle, that with the advice of the military authorities it has decided to sever all telephonic and telegraphic communication with Western Australia for a week. This will prevent returning soldiers from communicating with their relatives in the eastern States and it will also prevent public communication with the east. Even press messages will probably be affected.

Commenting again on the Townsville raid, Mr Curtin said as on other occasions the enemy had struck while Australia generally was 'weekending'. He said he intended to have something to say on this question to Parliament. He thinks the 'weekend' mentality of Australia with the war so close is incredible. Possibly, a 'wake-up' editorial on these lines would be helpful.

An important series of meetings will be held in Melbourne commencing on 5 August. They will include War Cabinet, War Council, possibly full Cabinet, also meetings of the Premiers Conference and the Loan Council. Important decisions are expected to come from these meetings. The Premiers will be told plainly that they must police the liquor laws, otherwise the Commonwealth will take over their function in this regard. They will also be told that they must cut down their expenditure during the forthcoming year. It is expected also that there will be some 'backlash' from the High Court decision on uniform taxation. This conference might well constitute another wedge in the weakening State structure.

The Prime Minister, and possibly senior Ministers, will leave Sydney on 16 August for Brisbane for important meetings there with MacArthur and other Allied chiefs. He will be there for several days.

\textsuperscript{25} David Watkins (1896-1971), Labor MHR for Newcastle (NSW), 1938-68.
29 July 1942

Curtin is angry with the South Australian Premier, Playford, over his comments on the coal shortage in South Australia. The PM said that coal was short in the southern States today because ships were being assembled for the forthcoming operation of which he spoke some days ago.

War Cabinet today had before it a report from E.G. Theodore on the operations of the Allied Works Council. This report gave details of the enormous undertakings being handled by the Council. Authorisations to the Council now total £69 million, of which commitments to 30 June accounted for £48.9 million. Actual expenditure on that date was £32,297,000. Itemised expenditure was New South Wales £9.75 million, Victoria £7.3 million, Queensland £4.9 million, South Australia £5.2 million, Western Australia £1.45 million, Tasmania £35,000, Northern Territory £2,063,000, Port Moresby £467,000, Australian Capital Territory £1,012,000. Theodore expressed appreciation of the work of the officers concerned in these vast undertakings. Curtin said he regarded the report as evidence of the preparedness for the defence of Australia.

The Sydney Daily Telegraph this morning published a story about recruiting having reached saturation point. Forde was asked about this and his 'off-the-record' explanation was: A complete review is being made of the manpower demands for the services and essential production. Before the Coral Sea and Midway battles the Chiefs of Staff had wanted a defence force double its present strength. They realised that this would tax Australian manpower resources to an unbearable limit and, in view of recent happenings, principally the Allied successes in these two sea battles, they had modified their view. To keep Australia secure from attack, the Army could not be reduced by one man, and more would be needed because of the lack of aircraft and naval strength. It was proposed, however, to form new branches within the Army and to concentrate mainly on the expansion of the mechanised side. Forde said that the strength of our air and sea power could be seen in the circumstances which enabled the Japanese to take long convoys over great distances and land thousands of troops wherever they wished.
30 July 1942

Mr Curtin was annoyed by Fadden’s statement on coal last night. ‘What did they do when they were in power?’ he asked. ‘Bob [Menzies] sat here like a pontiff and then decided to go and make a speech which aggravated the bloody position.’

Curtin said that Playford told him unless South Australia got more coal, industries would have to close from Thursdays to Mondays. The PM said he tried to impress upon Playford the acute position caused by the lack of shipping. Playford’s idea seemed to be that South Australia had the only industries that mattered, and that they should get coal whatever happened elsewhere. ‘I undertook to do everything humanly possible to get ships,’ said Mr Curtin. ‘I said I had no apologies for the position, which was one of the hazards of war.’ Curtin added that Playford seemed to want ‘an economic El Dorado in a world of misery’.

There are indications that the Japs are increasing their naval forces in the South-West Pacific and in Malayan waters. In the South-West Pacific the force includes heavy cruisers and an aircraft carrier. This has meant some diversion of our shipping.

The PM was asked about the BBC broadcast in which Air Marshal Harris warned the Germans about coming bombings. Curtin said he did not think the raids to date had done too much damage to German industries. He thought the German people should be able to stand bombings as well as the British—in fact, their morale should be higher in view of the great number of German victories. He read extracts of a message he had received from London (presumably from Mr Bruce). There was a general feeling in London that something was wrong, especially with the general direction of the war. There was a feeling that there should be a smaller War Cabinet. The move to get Beaverbrook back into the War Cabinet was more than a kite. It would be a bad move in view of his bad influence over Churchill. If he got back, Bevin

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27 Air Marshal Sir Travers Arthur Harris (1892-1984), known as ‘Bomber’ Harris, Head, RAF Bomber Command, 1941-45.
28 Lord Beaverbrook (1879-1964), United Kingdom Minister of Aircraft Production, 1940; Minister of Supply, 1941.
29 Ernest Bevin (1881-1951), United Kingdom Minister of Labour and National Service, 1940-45.
and Attlee would resign. Beaverbrook's production work had been severely criticised by the London press (except Beaverbrook's own papers). The agitation for a second front was increasing, fanned by the newspapers ('of course,' Curtin interpolated).

He was gloomy about Russia. He read from a cable which said it was no longer possible to say that the fighting power of the Russian Army had not suffered. They could not give much more ground without reducing seriously that fighting power which remained. The territory lost recently had been an important food production area. If the Germans crossed the Lower Don they would directly threaten the Caucasian oilfields, which even if captured might not be available for six months as the Russians would undoubtedly destroy them. Russian oil supplies elsewhere would allow her to carry on but she would be hampered seriously.

Mr Curtin was asked what would happen if Russia were compelled to sue for peace. He replied that the outlook would be black. The Axis would have control of virtually all the world's oil, after a drive which would undoubtedly be successful against Persia and the Suez, with the exception of America. The United States had the oil but the difficulty would be to carry it where it was needed. The Axis ocean campaigns would be directed then almost wholly against tankers.

The PM said, 'I hope you can get some comfort from this—I can't.' He said our trouble was that in the absence of seapower 'we could not shift our potential fighting strength to the thrusting place'.

Getting off this subject Mr Curtin said he had been horrified to learn the amount of pillaging which had been going on in many ports, with so-called 'merchants' acting as fences. Vigorous corrective action was now being undertaken but it was not yet ready for announcement.

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4 August 1942

The Federal Government has received a cable from the British Government intimating that Air Marshal Harris' broadcast warning to the German people that the RAF would bomb them city by city was intended only for the German people. Of course, said the cable in effect, Britain couldn't carry out the threat yet a while.

The government has also been told that Vichy had rejected United States representations for the removal of French ships now in Alexandria Harbour to United States ports. Therefore, the British Mediterranean Commander has been told definitely that he must destroy the ships if the Nazi danger to Alexandria becomes acute and if the French Admiral still refuses to cooperate.

Mr Curtin is worried and angry over the loss of the West Australian battalion at Ruin Ridge in the Middle East. He thought at first that the whole of the 9th Division had been involved but was relieved today to get a clarification. He said the West Australian battalion had been 'butchered'. He said the 9th Division should have been brought back here with the others. He was angry that the Australians had again been made the 'chopping block' although there were 900,000 other troops in the Middle East. Once again he said the tanks had arrived too late.

Mr Curtin was asked whether there was any truth in Axis reports that Mr Churchill was in Russia. He said there was no truth in this, but added: 'I think there is a meeting brewing between the heads of the two governments.' He would not elaborate on this but there was a general view that Stalin and Churchill would meet or were meeting at some chosen meeting place. He said to regard even this oblique reference as a matter of the closest secrecy for obvious reasons.

The Federal Government has received an astonishing report on Russia from the British Foreign Office. Dr Evatt quoted several passages to show, he said, 'the strange way in which the British mind works'. The report mentioned that the Russian newspapers were full of promotions and rewards for bravery not only in the armed forces but among workers in factories. Evatt took the tone of the report to suggest that the Foreign Office was amazed that awards should be given to workers.
The report was not very favourably disposed towards the Soviet administration. Explaining how the Russians got things done, the Foreign Office remarked that 'a miracle usually happens to effect this'. Another passage in the report said 'if this race of 180 million had Teutonic efficiency, it would be a menace'. The report did not make it clear whom the Russians would be a menace to!

The Aircraft Production Minister, Senator Cameron, discussing the new Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation bomber now being produced in Australia, said it was a 400 miles per hour (mph) dive bomber that could carry two torpedoes. It was equipped with a perisopic sight, had gun turrets on either side and guns posted at the tail and in front. It was claimed to be a unique plane. It was designed by Wackett.

Senator Cameron said that the Boomerang fighter had exceeded expectations. On climbing trials it had defeated the Kittyhawk and Air Cobra. Its ceiling was 24,000 feet but with a supercharger it could reach 30,000 feet. A 1200 horsepower (hp) twin-row Wasp engine developed 320 mph but, with a 1700 hp engine installed, the speed would be stepped up to 400 mph. In addition, it was believed to be more manoeuvrable than the Zero. The plane itself was an improved design of the Wirraway, which itself is very similar to the Zero. Senator Cameron claimed that the plane had been produced in 14 weeks from blueprint to test flight. When mass production started shortly they would come off the line 'like sausages', he said. Everything on the plane excepting ball races was made in Australia. Cameron also disclosed that wooden jigs had been substituted for iron jigs and this had enabled the aircraft industry to be expanded as rapidly as it was. Discussing tanks, Senator Cameron mentioned that we were now installing radial engines in Australian-made tanks. These were twin-row Wasp and their installation represented a radical development which had amazed overseas designers.

7 August 1942 United States marines land on Guadalcanal, Solomon Islands

9 August 1942 HMAS Canberra and three US cruisers are sunk in battle in the Solomon Islands

12–16 August 1942 Churchill, Stalin and Harriman hold conferences in Cairo and Moscow
17 August 1942

Mr Churchill and Stalin have met in Cairo to discuss the second front and other war plans. Nothing is yet known of the result of their conference. Information from the Solomons battle includes news of the loss of HMAS Canberra. About 500 of the complement are said to have been saved.

19 August 1942  Combined Operations raid on Dieppe

25 August 1942

Evatt revealed that three squadrons of Spitfires—48 in all—are actually on the way to Australia. They have passed the Cape and are due here within a month. Six Spitfires are already here. The personnel for the three Spitfire squadrons, about 700 men, have been in Sydney for ten days. The machines are of the latest type, capable of 390–400 mph, cannon firing and fitted with special tanks for tropical conditions. The personnel of two squadrons are Australians; British men will man the other.

Evatt said that the number of Spitfires diverted to the Middle East with Australian consent was 42, so we make a profit of six on the delay. The 42 Spitfires arrived in the Middle East on 20 July, too late for the crucial fighting, and after the lull had begun. Events had therefore shown, said Evatt, that the diversion was not required. The machines now on the way represent Britain's part of the bargain when we consented to the earlier diversion.

In getting the Spitfires originally, Evatt had a very hard fight. One meeting with Churchill lasted four hours, and finally Churchill said: 'I agree; we've got to give them to you.' The original arrangement made by Evatt was for three squadrons and thereafter replacements at the very high rate of 15 a month. The conditions of the diversion were (1) that the personnel should come right on to Australia; (2) that, in addition to the replacements coming forward as originally arranged, the 42 machines diverted should be made up to us within three months.

The air chief, Portal, was called in by Churchill and told of the decision. He said: 'This is going to be like...
pulling a tooth from Sholto Douglas.' Sir William Sholto Douglas, First Baron Douglas of Kirkside (1893-1969), Chief of RAF Fighter Command, 1939-42; Middle East Air Command, 1943-44.

Churchill replied: 'If what we give Australia doesn’t hurt us, we won’t be giving her anything that will help her.' Next day Sinclair (apparently primed by Portal and Douglas) came up with strong arguments in opposition. Evatt said: 'I thought all this was settled yesterday.' Churchill replied: 'It has got to go to Cabinet.' Portal was at the War Cabinet and he and Sinclair both put the case why the United Kingdom could not let us have the Spitfires. Portal said: 'We would be prepared to let Australia have additional Kittyhawks from the United States instead.'

Churchill called on Evatt to speak, and he hit them hip and thigh. He said: 'There is not one British soldier in Australia. The British Navy, on which we relied, has disappeared. Except for a few trainer types, there is not one British plane in Australia. Where do we stand with you?' Churchhill said: 'We have got to give Australia these machines. I take full responsibility.' He called for a show of hands and there were no dissenters.

The first request for the diversions was made by Attlee. Beasley rang Evatt at Gulgong and told him. Evatt came down to the meeting and the request was refused. Churchill then came in with a second and pressing request, including a personal appeal. In the War Cabinet, all the Opposition members were wholeheartedly in agreement with the diversion. Their view was that it was unthinkable that we should not heed the call of the Motherland. Evatt, as an aside, considered therefore that Hughes had been unscrupulous in his public statement to the effect: 'Where is the vaunted success of Dr Evatt’s mission if, as it now appears, we are not going to get the goods after all?'

Ministers reluctantly agreed with Curtin that there was no alternative but to consent to the diversion because, firstly, Churchill could and probably would make the diversions anyhow, and if he did, it would be on his terms, not ours. Secondly, Australians were going into action in the Middle East, and we could not refuse them the air help which experts said was essential. We therefore agreed to the diversion, but on binding conditions.

On censorship of Australian comment for overseas, Evatt says he thinks it should be most sparingly used, and he considers Bonney has made mistakes, but he puts it
this way: In February, because the British Government was not awake to our case, we had to take our case to the British public. Now Churchill is showing a disposition to help us. He has to overrule some of his own people to do it. While we have got him this way, we might have justification for using censorship to avoid getting his back up, since it is help for this theatre that is at stake. If he gets his back up or if he fails to 'do the decent thing', then we will have to go back to the methods of February. That would mean a loss of time which we can't spare.

From another source came the following brief facts: Admiral Somerville's\textsuperscript{40} squadron is being moved from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific theatre. I think it is already well on the way. Rabaul is next on the list, provided everything goes well in the Solomons. The 7th Division AIF has been selected for the job, I believe. Brett's\textsuperscript{41} successor in the air command is General Kenney.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{26 August 1942} Japanese land on Nauru and Ocean Island, and at Milne Bay in New Guinea, where they are repelled by Allied forces.

\textbf{28 August 1942}

Agreement has now been reached for the exchange of diplomatic representatives by Australia and the Soviet. Nothing will be announced until the representatives are selected. Curtin says it will not be easy to find the right man in Australia. He will say nothing about it until the selection is made. The Soviet Union was annoyed with Canada because, after the announcement of an agreement, Canada humbugged about and hasn't yet appointed its representative.

Curtin says our forces at Milne Bay are considered capable of dealing with the Japanese landing. A Japanese regiment, which consists of 3000 men, made the landing with very heavy loss. Curtin has had nothing yet about the Solomons battle. He has been informed, however, that a big Japanese fleet has left home waters and is now heading south, for what destination nobody yet knows. Various strategical considerations have been taken into account in plans to deal with this fleet, but it all depends

\textsuperscript{40} Admiral of the Fleet Sir James Fownes Somerville (1882-1949), Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, 1942-44.

\textsuperscript{41} Lieutenant General George Howard Brett (born 1886), Deputy Commander and Commander, South-West Pacific Area, 1942.

\textsuperscript{42} Major General George C. Kenney (born 1889), Deputy Commander and Commander, Allied Air Forces, South-West Pacific Area, 1942-45.
on our being able to get sufficient naval strength concentrated in time. Curtin says that the naval battle in the Solomons was only part of the general picture and, although it might have ended, it would be most unwise to convey the impression that the Allied victory would have a lasting effect on the general situation.

It is now impossible to get Admiral Somerville's fleet out of the Indian Ocean after all. The best that might now be done is to transfer a number of units which are sufficiently far to the north to be of assistance in our waters. Curtin suggested that they might blast Japanese-held centres in the Netherlands East Indies, thus creating a valuable diversion. However, he has not been informed yet of the precise situation regarding the use of this part of the fleet.

There is considerable resentment in Australian military circles over the passing over of General Morshead in the Middle East while other officers less experienced and subordinate to Morshead have been singled out for promotion by the British command. Curtin remarked: 'It's the old story as far as we are concerned.'

Curtin revealed that no formal invitation had yet come from President Roosevelt regarding the proposed visit of dominion Prime Ministers to America. The proposal was first suggested to Curtin informally through the United States Minister Johnson. There will be no formal invitation until he accepts, if he does. He declines to say what he proposes to do and leaves the feeling that he might put the matter to Parliament, or at least to the War Council. He also leaves the impression that it would not be impossible for him to leave after the budget is disposed of, but that nevertheless it would be difficult. He said that his position was different from that of other dominion Prime Ministers because he was subject, in effect, to a form of direction by a representative of another government. He was referring to MacArthur's position in Australia, and he said that he had to maintain MacArthur's authority, while at the same time ensuring...
that Australia’s viewpoint and requirements were fully considered. It had not been difficult to maintain this delicate balance because he, MacArthur and Blamey, got on well personally.

The government has information of a large-scale increase in German submarine building.

Sugar rationing will commence on Monday. The announcement will come from Melbourne, probably on Sunday, and any previous publication is censorable.

31 August 1942 Sugar rationing is introduced at the rate of one pound a head per week.
3 September 1942 Japanese land in the Solomon Islands.
5 September 1942 Germans enter Stalingrad.

8 September 1942

Commenting on statements by Wendell Willkie regarding inadequate Allied equipment in the Middle East, Mr Curtin said the whole question came back to one of transport. That question also affected Australia. The Allies would be able to drive the Japs out of New Guinea entirely if they had the transport facilities to enable them to take men and equipment to this place. Australia could afford to take risks if she had more transport. But as it is she is obliged to keep troops in West Australia and in the east to guard against surprise attacks. The same problem also arose with regard to islands within the New Zealand Government’s sphere. Mr Curtin disclosed that the Japanese have occupied Nauru and Ocean Island.

Mr Curtin again refused to comment on the proposal that he should visit America. However, there is some ground now for the belief that he might go under certain circumstances. He would have to be convinced that his visit would be of real value and would accomplish something that could not now be achieved by exchange of cables. He said: ‘I would not be going there to be banqueted.’

Curtin indicated that the government would not do anything to influence a decision by Air Force authorities to allow Falstein to attend to his parliamentary duties. Curtin said it was clearly pointed out to Falstein before he enlisted that he would be subject to discipline. Curtin believes that

45 Wendell Willkie (1892–1944), American politician; Republican candidate for US Presidency defeated by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1940.
46 Sydney Max Falstein (1914–67), MHR for Watson (NSW), 1940–49; enlisted in RAAF in 1942, was court-martialled for using insubordinate language to a superior officer and sentenced to 28 days detention.
Members of Parliament should not enlist, as their duties as a Member were quite as important as their duties as a soldier.

Asked by a press representative if he had heard the report that Air Force authorities were 'laying for' Falstein because of some of his pre-enlistment utterances, Mr Curtin said he knew nothing of this. He said Falstein was now undergoing important examinations and he would get some more leave privileges after he had passed the exams. He could not be expected to be released for parliamentary duties while a member of an air crew.

Incidentally, while dealing with this question, Mr Curtin revealed that one day last week, to deal with an expected emergency, every Air Force unit was on 24 hours' notice to move. The emergency did not eventuate. That was the time when a big Japanese fleet movement had been reported.

Re Jap advance at Kokoda: General Headquarters declined to give correspondents any guidance on this question. Advice from Canberra is: 'Don't fall into the same trap as the correspondents fell into over Milne Bay.' Official sources refused to enlarge upon this, or to indicate the possible outcome of the operation.

9 September 1942

The government has selected Mr William Slater, Speaker of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, as Australian Minister to Russia. No announcement will be made until the Soviet Government formally accepts the nomination, which may be in a few days. In the meantime, pictures and a biography could be dug up. Slater is well known in Victoria but hardly known at all outside that State. He is a barrister, recognised as a liberal clear thinker, and has been a member of the Labor movement for many years.

Commenting on Admiral King's visit to London, Mr Curtin said: 'It doesn't augur much good for us.' He added that King was in London to see how much better Hitler could be fought and Stalin helped.

'It is going to be a long struggle for us to hold this place,' said Mr Curtin with some despondency. 'We might have a 100 years' war.'
He said he could get plenty of ships to transport reinforcements to the 9th Division in the Middle East but he couldn't get any to reinforce our men in Port Moresby.

Commenting on Churchill's statement that Britain was now building more ships than were being sunk, Mr Curtin said he did not believe it. The latest confidential report to the government covering the period from 1 August to 21 August showed total Allied losses of about 500,000 tons, or at the rate of about 750,000 tons for a full month. This was greater than the average. He admitted that there might have been some transmission error and that 21 August might have been intended to be 31 August, in which event Churchill's statement might be closer to the truth but it was not much comfort in any case to know we were losing so much shipping.

Mr Curtin said that the Japanese fleet, which last week was reported to be heading south, did not now appear to be as strong. A portion of it had either been diverted or was refuelling, or the Japanese had learned of certain intended moves from the Allied side.

11 September 1942

British troops land in Madagascar, with little opposition.

11 September 1942

Off-the-record background on the Madagascar operation links it up with the present situation in Syria. The British Government delayed the announcement of the Madagascar position pending arrangements to have a de Gaullist representative take charge of the civil administration of the island after the Vichy elements had been subdued. The British Government has been embarrassed by de Gaulle on a number of occasions. He has not the qualities of leadership for such a movement and delays in some operations have been due to difficulty in reaching an understanding with him. There is a lot of unrest in Syria at the moment because the de Gaullists are emphasising their victory over the Vichyites with the result that the civil administration is not settling down and there is friction. The British Government is not happy over this position.
When Mr Curtin in Parliament during the week revealed that a 'very senior' officer had been in New Guinea, he was referring to General Sutherland, General MacArthur's Chief of Staff. There is now official worry about the position there. MacArthur told Curtin the Allied forces had been out-generalled and out-maneuvered. Brigadier Potts had been taken from the command of the Allied troops in this area and he had been replaced by Brigadier Porter. However, the position is not yet serious and the Allies have started a movement which they are confident will outflank the enemy. The fighting is still a long way from Port Moresby, which is not threatened. The Japanese, even if they are successful in the present movement, cannot attack Moresby successfully for a long time because of the difficulty of moving the large forces that would be necessary along the narrow mountain roads.

When Evatt in Parliament referred to the internment of some of the Australia First members being commuted, he meant that special steps had been taken to ensure that they were under constant surveillance. One man has been sent to live in Bourke and another in Narrabri where they will be watched constantly by the police. They may not leave the towns.

14 September 1942

The purpose of Sir Owen Dixon's long conference with Roosevelt during the weekend was again to impress upon him the need for assistance to Australia. Curtin's words were: 'Dixon went to put the same case to Santa Claus as we have been putting up since January.' He said the conference was 'of very great importance'. Its purpose was to avoid the 'too little, too late' possibility that is uppermost in the mind of the Commonwealth Government.

Regarding the position in the Pacific generally, Mr Curtin said that the Americans were finding it difficult to hang on to the Solomons. He advised caution when assessing the value of Berlin Radio's announcement that the battleship Tennessee and a big United States cruiser had been sunk in these waters. The general position was that neither side was strong enough in the Pacific to inflict a decisive defeat on the other.
Curtin was very critical of Menzies' Friday night broadcast on inflation possibilities. He revealed that on Friday he had a talk with Sir Claude Reading of the Commonwealth Bank on the question of the budget 'gap'. He said he told Reading that he had asked for the British Eastern Fleet to come into Australian waters. He asked Reading: 'If they offered to transfer this fleet to us, would you take it?' Reading replied enthusiastically that he would. 'Well,' replied Curtin, 'your gap would be increased by £40 million because that is what it would cost us to maintain it.'

Curtin also revealed that he had asked America to send three fully equipped divisions here. This was his third string. He had already tried for naval and aerial assistance without result. The importance of his emphasis on equipment was

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54 Sir Claude Reading (1874-1946), Chairman, Commonwealth Bank of Australia, 1934-56.
that it would release Australian manpower to provide other equipment. He asked: 'What if Roosevelt said, "You will have to finance these divisions"? Am I to say we cannot defend the country because we can't get the money?'

As a third illustration he said that if 250,000 men were released from the factories to go into the Army, it would have the effect of reducing the taxable field, the income field for investment, and it would add £45 million to the government's liabilities as an employer of these men in the Army. The Army alone was now costing £97 million a year to maintain.

Curtin used these illustrations as a reply to those who said that inflation was near. He said no country could
finance a war by orthodox methods and he quoted official documents showing the extent to which Britain had gone into credit expansion and he gave British opinion to show that Australian financing had been sounder than Britain's. He asked how Germany and Russia had been able to finance their vast war efforts.

Mr Curtin said he was not at all frightened of the present tendencies. All that he feared was that black markets and bootleg buying might develop as people became more and more willing to pay more for what they wanted. That was a trend which the government would clamp down hard on.

Asked whether the government was going to take action to stop lotteries, Curtin indicated that he had considered this question and decided for the time being at any rate against any action. His view was that lotteries did not need the expenditure of men and material as racing did. Also those that existed were operated by the States which derived considerable revenue from them.

17 September 1942  
Japanese cross the Owen Stanley Range, are halted by Australian troops at Imita Ridge

Curtin said that the situation in the Solomons was 'no better'. He had just had half an hour with MacArthur on the secret phone. He did not mean things were worse but the Japanese had a heavy fleet engaged in the Solomons. The Americans had naval strength there—which we did not have in New Guinea—but if the Americans should be beaten in the Solomons and the Japanese naval forces then turned against New Guinea, things would be serious. He has received a reply from Roosevelt, which he described as 'very sympathetic and very broad'. Roosevelt and Churchill for the time being are preoccupied in the undertaking Churchill gave to Stalin in Moscow. Curtin said, however, 'I am happy to say I believe as a result of these cables there has been a psychological change of mind on the part of the United States Chiefs of Staff towards the Pacific. What they will probably do, because it is easiest, will be to give us more air power—but even that will take some time to get here.'
Curtin went on to say that the Chiefs of Staff had been
directed to begin planning for the push in the Pacific.
This would not of course mean instant action. Many plans
would be prepared, probably all with some faults, and
a scheme thrashed out. Curtin said: 'A man was here
today (Blamey) whom I propose to push a long way north
if I can. It would be a most effective build-up and would
have an important psychological effect. It does not mean,
however, that I have lost confidence in Rowell.'

Curtin said he thought we could hold Port Moresby and
steps to this effect were being taken. The important point
was that we were now defending Australia 2000 miles
north of where the last government planned. (This refers
to the Menzies plan to evacuate north of Maryborough,
Queensland.) He said he did not feel easier nor did he feel
more anxious. He did not think the Japs could take Port
Moresby but they might. He was not going to lay down
definite predictions. The government could not send
100,000 men to Port Moresby. Firstly, they could not get
this number there; secondly, they could not supply them.

Curtin throughout the interview spoke in serious terms
and without the touch of humour that invariably lightens
his press conferences.

There was a bit of a row at the War Council today.
Beasley and Hughes spoke strongly against any tendency
to gloss over mistakes by our Army commanders. They
made no criticism of MacArthur. However Blamey, who
was there, gave an assurance that this would not be done.

18 September 1942

Curtin said today that the position in New Guinea was
now much more stable. Fighting had died down and
our men were in a much stronger position. He thought
now that if the ordinary rules held good, we should be
able to hold on until we were ready for an offensive.

21 September 1942

America and Britain have rejected our further appeals
for aid and for the next six months we shall have to
manage with what we have. Curtin told us the whole story today, reading us the secret cables from Bruce, Dixon and Roosevelt, and he is convinced that nothing can alter the decision, and that it would be useless for him to go to Washington. Dixon told him that there appeared to be some things Roosevelt did not want to convey in any other way, but Curtin is sure he just wanted to soften the blow as much as possible.

The major difficulty is that Churchill and Roosevelt framed the basic strategy last December (before Singapore fell) and, apart from minor modifications, it still stands and cannot be disturbed. Its first point is the defeat of Germany, leaving Japan to wait until that can be accomplished. Australia has been knocking her head against a brick wall, therefore, in urging that the Pacific should be made a major theatre immediately.

Curtin opened his outline by saying that he was 'profoundly disturbed' at the replies from the Prime Minister and the President. 'They mean, in effect, that it is vain to appeal for these places to be made a major theatre. I am not surprised. You were told all this when I was in Opposition. The bloody country was told what would happen long before the war came.' He read the messages in full but would not allow us to take a note. The most significant passage was from Dixon who said that Roosevelt's initial gesture of sympathy on receiving the representation had been overshadowed by the decisions of the United States and British Chiefs of Staff which were preoccupied with 'another matter' and did not want to divert anything from it.

Bruce gave a very good summing-up of repeated conferences 'up and down the line', repeating the arguments until it was impossible to repeat them again. The major strategy decision of last December was not communicated to Australia until May when, said Bruce, it was too late to make an effective protest. Possibly if we had been consulted at the time it might have been different. Germany was the major enemy and anything sent elsewhere was regarded as diverted from the main objective.

Both Britain and the United States thought the Allied naval strength in the Pacific sufficient to deal with anything Japan could send against us. Bruce pointed
out the serious effects a major naval defeat would have. It would almost certainly be followed by a major invasion attempt against Australia, which at best would interfere with the plans for an ultimate offensive against Japan. It was suggested to him that the Japs had not enough ships to send more than 10 or 12 divisions against us, and that we had ample men here to deal with them (a point which Roosevelt made personally in his appeal also). Bruce pointed out that our troops were widely dispersed over a huge continent, and that if the Japs landed a large force at a remote point it would not be possible to concentrate enough of our troops to prevent the enemy getting a foothold.

On the air side it was felt that there should not be more diversions from the major objective (although Roosevelt said that commitments would be met as far as possible). The United States will not send the three divisions of troops. It was stated that this number of men would require one million tons of shipping, which could not be spared in one batch at present. It would not be worth sending them piecemeal as they might get caught and destroyed by the Jap naval forces—and if we had a naval victory over Japan, they would not be needed in Australia. Anyway, troops would also be needed elsewhere.

Roosevelt expressed the belief that Australia would be able to hold out with what we have against any attack. Bruce said that if a major invasion attempt were made, Churchill would undoubtedly keep his promise of some time ago and send us troops, but it had been pointed out in Britain that this would weaken India and Burma and leave them more open for the Japs.

Curtin said it meant that this country had a six months' menace to survive. That period would take us to the European spring. We had to do it ourselves with blood and sweat and hard work. He knew that unfair, unjust and hasty decisions had been made concerning men taken for Allied works and other urgent jobs, but in a crisis some such mistakes could not be avoided. We had never 'moaned or squealed'. It was natural that 140 million English-speaking people should have more concern for 40 million similar people than for 7 million, just as we had more concern for Sydney than for Borneo. But for the Coral Sea battle, we would have faced this position last March,
and Midway had further increased the difficulties of the Japs.

'I cannot moan to Roosevelt,' the PM continued, 'because the Japs tried to take the Solomons and have not succeeded.' (Dixon in his message said there had been growing official concern last week about the Solomons.)

'Your guess is as good as mine as to whether the Japs have retired to gather more strength to return,' said Curtin.

'Until they have the Solomons they cannot make a large-scale sea attack against Moresby, and in the meantime they are making the difficult land drive over the range.' (He told us earlier that the supply problem 'had just about tricked the bloody Japs in New Guinea', adding that perhaps W.M. Hughes or the newspaper strategists had been responsible for this satisfactory position.) He said he did not think they could take Port Moresby.

'Until they take it we have an anchor a long way from an effective invasion point,' he said. 'Moresby is vitally related to the strength of the attack they can bring against Darwin and related to the manner in which we can maintain and strengthen Darwin. We have to maintain it, even by the tyrannical use of labour. I agree with Rosevear that mistakes have been made, that injustices have been done, that the wrong men have been sent away, but there has not been time to wait. Your leader writers can say, "Land, air and naval support cannot be increased at present because of the demands being made in other theatres."'

He went on to say he was sure we would hold out. We were like a football team with 18 good players, but no reserves, at the premiership. Our men had the necessary

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56 John Solomon Rosevear (1892–1953), Labor MHR for Dalley (NSW), 1931–53; Speaker, House of Representatives, 1943–50; controller of footwear and leather supplies during World War II.
guts and heart. If the Japs got 30,000 men over we should still hold Moresby.

Curtin was asked if he expected 30,000 Japs to cross the range, and he said the attempt might be made, but we would be able to hold them. We were not defending New Guinea of course, we were defending Australia. He was quite satisfied with the strategic plan in the north. He had never moaned about Buna or Gona but he had been concerned about Milne Bay because it looked as though they were coming round the coast. He wanted to see the commanders given credit for the good job they had done and were doing in New Guinea. Japan had been in the war nine months, and in the first three months they had got almost as far as they had got since.

‘If the War Council had its way in February of last year the Japs would never have got a footing in Indo-China where they had been able to base their planes for an attack. At that time we “cried wolf” while Menzies in Britain was saying there would be no war with Japan.’

Going on to a general review of Australia’s position, Curtin said we had learned to use aircraft as ‘flying artillery’, to be widely dispersed on the ground and concentrated against targets. This had meant dozens of landing strips and aerodromes in the north, all capable of bearing the weight of heavy bombers. The defence of Sydney and Port Kembla was in the north—and north of Maryborough. That was why £14 million was being spent there so quickly. The same thing applied to the supply routes to Darwin.

‘There is a catch,’ said Curtin. ‘The Japs may discover (while the Pacific lifeline is enormously attractive because if they cracked it we would be isolated) that they could make an attempt to take Australia from Timor and Java, instead of from New Guinea. That would bring them down the west coast. They might base on the Kimberleys and cross overland—and we would need an armoured division there and not the commandos that are being stupidly suggested. They may bypass Perth and come diagonally across in this direction. On the other hand they might be satisfied to take West Australia because it is good country. That would make the Indian Ocean as unsafe as the Pacific—that is one reason why Madagascar was important to the Japs. Submarines based there or in
Western Australia would allow them to menace the whole of supplies bound for the Middle East, Burma and India. Darwin could be attacked successfully from Port Hedland or Broome.

Earlier in the interview, when asked about the latest criticism by Hughes that our men had not been taught jungle fighting, Curtin said the painting of uniforms green was ‘all balls’. In dry patches khaki was far more effective, and after many tests it had been decided that khaki was most serviceable. Hughes had been told that last week. The Japs wore hardly anything, and it was ‘hooey’ about their painting their faces green. Hughes had suggested the training of our men in jungle fighting—but where could that be done? It was as sensible as the foolish suggestion that all our troops should be trained as commandos. He was thoroughly annoyed about the suggestions published abroad that we should take Dakar. ‘Rommel will be well advised about Dakar before the bloody thing gets there. Every nitwit in the democracies has the right to get up and tell the world what is going to be done.’

Two minor items: Curtin was asked if on the racing pages he would prefer not to have published a table showing the horses most favoured by papers, although not showing the detailed papers’ selections. He said he thought it would defeat the objective of the new regulation, but he would consult the Crown Solicitor.

Drakeford stated that there is to be an Air Board inquiry into Killer Caldwell’s movements. It appears he left the Middle East with orders to go to Australia, but he turned up in London where he made a BBC broadcast. No one knows how he got there, and he hasn’t told them yet.

The Curtin interview lasted more than an hour. He reiterated that he was ‘profoundly disturbed’ and he seemed glad to talk about his troubles.

23 September 1942 United Air Lines begins a trans-Pacific service from San Francisco to Brisbane for the US Air Force

25 September 1942 Australian troops begin counter-offensive in the Owen Stanley Range, pushing Japanese troops back to Buna.
29 September 1942

The government is sending Dr Wilson, Commonweal th Statistician and Secretary of the Labour Department, to London for research work in connection with post-war reconstruction.

Curtin emphasised that he did not intend going to New Guinea. He said that while he was not entirely satisfied with New Guinea, he was confident that the Japs were being held. On the basis of the present forces engaged the position was satisfactory, but of course, if the Japs were able to bring up more men, our forces might have to retreat. At present they were trying an outflanking movement around the lower levels of the Owen Stanley Range.

Curtin revealed that some months ago Darwin was 'bashed to pieces' by Jap bombers. At that time they had reached a position where they would have been able to establish a bridgehead on Australian soil. However, the position generally had improved since then.

Curtin said that if he had had the equipment used by the British in Madagascar or that carried by the recent convoy to Russia, Australian forces would have been able to sweep the Japanese out of the north. Madagascar had been expensive to the British in material.

He urged fullest support to the Allied command in this area. He regretted the ability of so many people to rush into print with criticism. It was pointed out to Curtin that Blamey's private life might not inspire an example, but Curtin said that there had been no complaint against his soldiering. He had been in Greece and Crete. Curtin didn't deny statements that he had personally sent Blamey to New Guinea to see what was doing there. Blamey had the complete confidence of MacArthur. It was Blamey who had been insistent throughout that the Allies were underestimating Jap strength. He asked, if Blamey stood down, who would be eligible to succeed him? He said also that an answer to all the criticism might be that no Japanese had yet set foot on the Australian continent.

Curtin's tone throughout was that fault and negligence should not be overlooked but that our leaders should be supported until they proved themselves incapable of leadership.
3 October 1942

Curtin seemed surprised to learn from Blamey that he had sent back to Australia Lieutenant General Rowell, who was in command in New Guinea. This follows the return of Blamey to this area. Rowell himself sent back his immediate subordinate, Rourke, last week. Curtin said he wants to know what it is all about. He doesn’t know Rowell personally but he wants to see him to hear his story. His return had nothing to do with any reverse, as the situation in New Guinea at present is favourable. Therefore, he wanted to find out what was behind Blamey’s action.

MacArthur will be in New Guinea probably this weekend. Drakeford is already there, and Forde arrived last night or today. Both Ministers will be back in Melbourne and Canberra respectively on Monday or Tuesday. Curtin is a bit worried. He said the Ministers had been forced there through reflections on their courage. He did not like having so many eggs in one basket.

Behind the brief statement that Mr Sinclair McGibbon has submitted a report to the government relating to the financial arrangements between the British and Australian governments lies a somewhat astonishing story. McGibbon went abroad to haggle with the British Government on war costs and as a result he has been able to cut down the British bill to Australia since the outbreak of war by £21 million. This has involved tedious accountancy investigations extending over a considerable time. Some extraordinary items were revealed. For instance, Australia is billed £40 an hour for the use of British bombers in the Middle East fighting. If the airmen return with their bombs intact, they are still charged with the cost of the bombs. If they have to use ammunition in fighting off attackers, they are charged for that too. Curtin says it costs nearly as much to maintain our Sunderland squadron in England as it does to keep the RAAF going in Australia. It appears that every time a Sunderland returns from a flight it is serviced. Australia is charged with everything used and the labour employed in servicing.

Curtin commented that war loadings must be very high in England if the cost to Australia was any evidence. He said the Australian Government did not want to get out of the

60: Brigadier Henry Rourke (born 1896), 1 Australian Corps, 1942.
war for nothing but he appeared surprised at some of the items revealed in McGibbon's report. This follows previous negotiations between the British and Australian governments regarding the high cost charged by Britain for the maintenance of Australian troops fighting in the Middle East and the passage money charged for every soldier brought back from the Middle East.

Curtin said he had had no bad news from the Solomons. He went on to say that if some of the government's critics were in Russia at present they would probably say that Timoshenko was not showing sufficient offensive spirit—the proof being that some Germans were in the streets of Stalingrad. 'You cannot plan wars in newspaper offices,' he said. 'In three months' time we shall probably be told we should have foreseen that the Japs knew all along that they could not get through New Guinea and that their real objectives were Darwin and Broome. We shall also be told that we should have heavily reinforced troops in Timor to have prevented that attack.' Those present at the interview saw clearly that Curtin was spiking some of Murdoch's guns as this is a favourite line of criticism in his papers.

Since the beginning of the war the Allies have lost about 15 million tons of shipping. (Curtin is not so sure if this includes naval losses but he doesn't think so.) This is about half the total we started with. He smiled a bit grimly when someone remarked that the old claim had been made again that building was overtaking sinkings.

There will probably be some delay in the exchange of Ministers with Russia. Curtin said the Russians were trying to get someone who spoke English, and also someone who was a 'right winger'. He said that Whitehall had approved of our man but the time of announcement was uncertain. From another source I learn that Slater is a bit too insignificant in stature for the job.

While on the question of Russia, Curtin said that Hitler was also crying out for a second front, and was saying that the Japs were not playing ball too well. The Germans were very angry with the Japs at the moment. It was worth thinking out whether war between Russia and Germany would be better for the Allies or the Axis. Four months hence the position might be different.
6 October 1942

Curtin was angry with the Daily Telegraph editorial this morning ['Hit out!' (Stalin); 'Hold on!' (Curtin)]. He said it was not much use giving newspapers the 'off-the-record' information if they were going deliberately off the track. He said that the newspapers would be sorry if they lost him as a friend as he was the only friend they had in the Labor Party. The Daily Telegraph, he said, was a 'nitwit' paper which was doing a great disservice to morale.

It was necessary to hold on in New Guinea until the Japanese Navy was defeated. When that happened our ships could sail round to Buna and Gona and it wouldn't be necessary for our land forces to put on an offensive. Meanwhile we had 60,000 men immobilised in New Guinea if the Japs struck somewhere else.

Curtin said he wanted to know what had happened to the Jap planes which were formerly in New Guinea. He was looking anxiously towards the Indian Ocean. It was certain that the Japs would try a major diversion after the Allied drive in North Africa got underway. He pointed out that Stalin was holding a line hundreds of miles inside his borders. We had lost our Navy and many men far away from our own coasts on which an enemy had not yet landed.

He was not going to be driven by public demand to send men to form suicide squads in New Guinea. Not only was there the danger of a trap and the danger, also, of having so many men immobilised away from Australia, but every additional man sent away from Australia gave new supply problems—problems which were greatly multiplied as soon as the men went into action. He did not know where the ships were coming from, in any case, to transport more men and supplies to New Guinea.

Curtin said he couldn't understand the mentality of Australian people. One day they were in a panic and the next they wanted more race meetings. He thought capricious newspaper leadership had a lot to do with it. When things looked bad in New Guinea, morale sagged; now things were better, everybody would probably want Christmas off.

He repeated that no more men would go to New Guinea if he could help it. If the Japanese won the Solomons battle, he did not know how we would be able to get...
Enter Austerity
Cartoon by Ted Scorfield
Bulletin, 2 September 1942

our men back from New Guinea. New Guinea wasn’t
Australia. It was only a place of military strategy and if we
took it entirely, it would not affect the war greatly because
the situation was dependent on factors far removed from
New Guinea. The fight against Japan was basically a sea
and air war with troops mainly filling an occupying role.

Later:
Curtin referred to newspaper reports of the Australian general
whose plans had brought about the improved position in
New Guinea. This was Lieutenant General Rowell, and the
correspondent who wrote the story travelled down with him in
the same plane from New Guinea. Curtin said that the plans
were not Rowell’s, but those of the Chiefs of Staff, and Rowell
implemented them. However, Rowell’s tactics had been
magnificent, but all the time he was conforming to set plans.
Curtin saw Rowell on Saturday. The fact that he was back in Australia did not mean that he was in disgrace. Curtin refused to give the reason for his return but he dropped enough hints to suggest that Rowell and Blamey had had a personal row. Curtin described it as ‘temperament’. It appears that when Blamey went to New Guinea, Rowell resented it—in the same way, according to Curtin’s description, as Forde would resent it if he (Curtin) directed him to do a job that he thought he was already doing. Blamey had gone to New Guinea because it was the Commander-in-Chief’s right to go anywhere he thought fit. Rowell’s services would be fully available to the Australian Army. Rowell, it also appears, was a bit disappointed that he hadn’t been cited for a decoration, and he voiced this to Blamey apparently.

MacArthur is now back in Australia from New Guinea. Curtin said he wasn’t at all happy when MacArthur and Blamey were there. A lucky Jap hit would have been ‘just too bad’, Curtin said.

After meetings of War Cabinet, War Council and Full Cabinet in Canberra next week, meetings of War Cabinet and War Council will be held in Melbourne in the following week. Tentatively and very much subject to alteration at the moment, Curtin may go to Western Australia for a week from 25 October. He hasn’t been home since Christmas. It is likely that Parliament will meet again in November for a short session, although this has not been decided. It is proposed that the Constitutional Convention should be held in Canberra early in December. Curtin will stay in Canberra over Christmas. He wants to be close to things because of the Axis habit of striking at Christmas and Good Friday periods.

9 October 1942

We had an amazing outburst from Curtin against Sir Keith Murdoch over the latter’s article in the Melbourne Herald on Tuesday night in which he assailed Forde as Army Minister, and criticised Curtin’s war policy. You probably have read Forde’s reply in Parliament on the subject. Curtin referred to the article without being prompted. He said:

Frankly this attack on Forde was silly and unfair. The basis of it was all wrong and what Sir Keith hopes to gain from it is...
hard to say. But I say it is no good for public morale. I do not like Sir Keith Murdoch. I do not trust him. He is utterly unscrupulous in the way he conducts his newspapers. Most of this goes back long before my time but I know the position. I know he talks to officers but they do not know what the general strategy is.

The cartoon he published during the Depression years of Mr Scullin depicting him getting away with the nation's wealth and assets was infamous and utterly unscrupulous. I do not know what he is up to with his articles. In the light of what he has written, I am surprised he does not blame some other Australians for the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse*, and he is probably working on the assumption that if we had had the two Australian divisions from the Middle East in Burma, that could have been saved.

He is full of hot air and witlessness. Apart from a peculiar lack of confidence in his own staff, he has a weak speciality for signed articles. I do not know any man with the capacity he has—or a managing editor who publishes two or three columns under his own name. I should have thought he had more to do.

Considering the importance of the paper it is a great pity that he writes these articles. He should leave it to the men under him who are more competent and are paid to do this work. He could, of course, direct them but he is sitting in judgement upon himself as a member of the Press Advisory Committee. That is not embarrassing to me as I find a good deal of value in the work of this committee.

I would say that at this moment that the struggle in the Coral Sea and New Guinea, the steps which have been taken in Darwin and Timor, are indicative of the capacity and organisation on the part of the Australian commanders with comparatively limited resources. This ranks them with any of the commanders in any part of the world.

Commenting on yesterday's communiqué, he said it appeared there was not a Jap in New Guinea at the moment, or at least there appeared to be none. He is afraid of some trap for our men and at the same time he is looking elsewhere for signs of a new Jap assault.

I have learned that the 25-pounder guns we are producing are very good. Two of these were hauled up over the ranges in New Guinea. Something like 735 rounds were fired from the two guns and their accuracy and rapidity of fire caught the Japs by surprise and they could not get away quickly enough. These guns are being produced in quantity.

**11 October 1942** Second Solomons sea battle—Japan loses two cruisers and five destroyers.
15 October 1942

The background details attached to the brief statement by Curtin following today's War Council meeting came from Curtin himself. He wanted publication of the story to pep up the morale of the Army, which has been lately receiving a lot of criticism following the reverses it suffered in New Guinea.

In a general review of the Pacific theatre Curtin said that a 'longish' struggle was ahead in the Solomons. We did not know whether the Japanese Navy was coming against us there and we did not want to move our Navy from this area. The Americans were sticking close to the aerodrome on the Solomons because it would be madness to take out the fleet until we had the carriers to enable us to operate away from the islands. The Japanese had to take the Solomons before they could go any further in the Pacific. The Allies wanted to keep the Japanese guessing. The Japanese lines of communications had been interrupted and they might not know the extent of their setback in the Solomons. We also did not want them to know our intentions regarding Rabaul.

We had to keep an eye on the Japanese, who might use Timor to go into the Indian Ocean or attack the northwest coast of Australia. The Japs were keeping up reconnaissances of the northwest coast to see what we were doing.

Our confidence in Port Moresby was indicated by our decision to construct docking facilities there and to provide fuel depots and other installations important to extensive operations. Curtin said we were shifting a motorised division to the west; also more troops, some of whom were on the way.

Curtin has had confirmation of the sinking of the Orcades and the Duchess of Athol off the west coast of Africa. They both carried large numbers of troops. There are about 2000 survivors. There is also a fear that the Oronsay has been sunk. No reports have been received from her for some time. Curtin said there was no truth in the German report that the Orcades and the Duchess of Athol carried Australian troops.
Later:
Information on the Solomons received by the government is that Japanese have landed west of the positions held by the Americans on Guadalcanal. The Japanese are coming in heavily. An important point in our favour is that the Japanese fleet can't stay there. They have to go away to supply, and their supply bases are a considerable distance away. So far as we know the Japs have two carriers in the Solomons area, but there may be others we don't know of. The Japanese are changing their signals every day and this is making it difficult for our intelligence to follow their movements.

Sir Guy Royle\textsuperscript{62} is said to be satisfied with the position at the moment. The theory the Americans are working on is that in a struggle of equal exhaustion the enemy will suffer most as they are at the end of their supply lines. Curtin said there are 200 enemy submarines in the Atlantic, but there are no recent reports of submarines off Australia's coastline.

There have been a lot of strikes at the Tyneside, but of course the censorship prevents news of them getting out. News of them is being suppressed because of the possible interpretation by the Allies that one member of the United Nations might not be pulling its weight. That is the general policy of censorship in handling strikes here and abroad.

Curtin praised the Australian miners for their recent efforts. He said that as a result of the improvement in output we had been able to send 16,000 tons of coal to Montevideo.

\textbf{22 October 1942}  German attacks on Stalingrad are weakening

\textbf{23 October 1942}  Battle of El Alamein begins in Egypt

\textbf{26 October 1942}

Forde today provided some information on the Owen\textsuperscript{63} gun controversy. As his public statement issued today shows, the Owen gun manufacturers have not yet fulfilled all the orders given to them by the government. As a matter of fact only a quarter of the order is filled. Forde said that the former Director-General of Ordnance, Major

\textsuperscript{62} Admiral Sir Guy Royle (1885-1954), Chief of Naval Staff, Royal Australian Navy, 1941-45.

\textsuperscript{63} Evelyn Ernest Owen (1915-49) was the inventor of the Owen submachine gun. The Army took a year to respond to Owen's initial approach and was criticized for its inertia.
General Milford, was now 'camped under a mango tree' in Queensland. The present director, Lieutenant General Beavis, was a very good man and the government relied on his judgement. The Owen gun is being used widely by the Volunteer Defence Corps and it was also in use in New Guinea but Forde declined to give the numbers.

The fact was that the Austen gun was a mass production job which had most of the Owen advantages, and at the same time is simple to manufacture and cheap. The Owen costs about £8 to make and the Austen £4. The Owen has a machined barrel and the Austen a drawn barrel and pressed steel parts. The Austen was described by Essington Lewis as the answer to a munition maker's dream, such is its simplicity. Forde said another reason why the Owen, and the Austen too, had not yet been very widely distributed was that ammunition for them was not available yet in sufficient quantities.

The Thompson machine gun was being used by Australians and Americans with very good results. While it cost about £60 it was only about 3 pounds heavier than the Owen and the .45 slug it fired was nearly always lethal, whereas the 9 mm bullet of the Owen and the Austen was often comparatively ineffective. The soldier in New Guinea always preferred his rifle to any submachine gun. The rifle was an accurate instrument whereas the submachine gun was effective only at 80 to 100 yards and could not be aimed for accurate shooting like a rifle.

Forde denied that there was any prejudice against the Owen. He thought Wardell and Owen had talked too much. Wardell, since he made his statement, had

64 Major General Edward James Milford (1892–1972), Master-General of Ordnance, 1941–42.
66 N.D. Wardell (born 1903), Manager, Lysaghts Port Kembla works, 1939–46.
expressed contrition. There are obviously some big new plans for the VDC but Forde would not discuss them. He admitted that his statement today in which he said the VDC could play a more important role was capable of wide interpretation. He may say something after his conference with VDC commanders in Melbourne at the weekend.

30 October 1942  Japanese naval forces withdraw from the Solomons

2 November 1942  Kokoda is recaptured from the Japanese

4 November 1942  Rommel’s forces in the Western Desert in full retreat

6 November 1942  General Montgomery announces ‘complete and absolute victory’ in Egypt

6 November 1942

Evatt stated that the new Australian Minister to the USSR left Australia yesterday. He will fly most of the way. Evatt also revealed that one of the primary reasons for the appointment of an Australian Minister, quite apart from the importance of the diplomatic exchange, was the belief that it would facilitate information regarding prisoners in Japanese hands. At present this information comes through Switzerland and is usually long delayed. The contact is unsatisfactory from all points of view. But Russia, technically at least, is still at peace with Japan, and she still maintains normal diplomatic relations. In future, therefore, it is hoped that news of Australian prisoners will come from Japan through Russian diplomatic channels. Evatt is not announcing this for the present at least.

‘Off the record’, Evatt gave as his reason for ordering an inquiry into the Sydney gas strike a suspicion that some ‘peculiar’ influences were at work. In the course of conversation he mentioned the possibility of sabotage. He said he couldn’t understand how such a short stoppage could have such a widespread effect. He thought that the company would have ample reserves of gas to take care of such a situation. He said the incident was an example of the ease with which such great disruption of industry could be caused.
7-8 November 1942  Allied forces land in French North Africa

9 November 1942  Germany invades Tunisia; British troops land in Algeria

12-15 November 1942  Naval battle of Guadalcanal, Japan loses 23 ships

19 November 1942  Russians launch counter-offensive at Stalingrad

20 November 1942

Curtin gave his first press conference in Canberra for a month today. The entire interview was occupied by discussion on the 'one army' proposal.

Curtin started off by announcing renewed Japanese activity in Timor, and an attack by Japanese raiders on Allied shipping in the Indian Ocean. Although he did not say so, these incidents were intended as a background to the discussion on Australia's territorial responsibilities and the need for mobility for its Army.

The raider story was canned by the censor on instructions from the naval authorities. The story is: Two Allied tankers with an escort vessel were proceeding in the Indian Ocean about 230 miles south of Cocos Island when two Jap raiders appeared. There was a battle with the escort vessel which drove off the attackers and sank one. This was a vessel of 1500 tons but it is not indicated whether it was a destroyer or an armed merchantman.

Curtin appealed to newspapers not to tie up the present issue with the 1916 conscription issue. This, he said, was a first-class way to kill the question. Newspapers all over Australia had been clamouring for one army, but now that the opportunity to get it arrived, they were providing as much inspirational material as possible to prime up the opponents of the proposal. Linking the question with 1916 would revive all the old animosities and feuds.

Curtin said he was not contemplating sending men to Europe. We did not have enough men to do it. He was now negotiating for the return of the 9th Division from the...
Middle East. He had also asked America for three more divisions but had been refused.

The request on the one army question came to Curtin from MacArthur in Perth. Curtin does not want it said, however, that MacArthur actually asked for it because technically MacArthur should have no concern with a political matter. Technically he was asking for all handicaps to be removed which would prevent his disposition of troops wherever they were needed.

Curtin urged that the United Australia Party be kept out of discussions. The Opposition, he said, by its pre-election pledge was as much pledged against overseas conscription as was the Labor Party. Curtin said Fadden's critical statement yesterday was a reasonable one. He had said what he had to say as Leader of the Opposition as kindly as he could.

Curtin disclosed that his government had already broken the law by sending an Australian labour battalion to New Caledonia. He also said that if Germany had been allowed completely to overrun Finland and Poland, Leningrad could not have stood up. What the Russians did was interpreted at the time as aggression but she was securing her frontiers by providing a buffer territory before Germany acted.

23 November 1942

Curtin said negotiations for the return of the 9th Division from the Middle East had been successful. The division would return as soon as the date of departure and transport could be arranged. Curtin said as he could not get the three divisions he had asked for from America, he must get back as many of our own men as he could. He thought, too, that the 9th Division had done enough for a while. He also had in mind the necessity of providing 30,000 men a year in replacements if the 9th Division stayed in the Middle East. Churchill and Roosevelt had approved of the return of these men. Roosevelt said they had done a very good job.

Mr Curtin revealed that long ago he had drawn the attention of the British authorities to the fact that there were no British forces in the Commonwealth to assist
Australia. That was before the negotiations which resulted in MacArthur coming here.

He revealed vital details of the directive covering the South-West Pacific, which have not been revealed before. Australia under the directive agrees to hold key military points against the Japs and to strive to check Japanese aggression across Australia. Australia also agrees to check the Japs in New Guinea, the Bismarcks, and the Solomons region and to protect land, sea and air bases in the South-West Pacific and its close approaches. These last words reveal the necessity for an amendment of the Defence Act which Curtin is now seeking. The directive also reveals that a nation whose forces are affected in any disposition may refuse the use of its forces if the project is considered to be unjustified. Also commanders of troops of any nation may appeal to its government if they consider that MacArthur's orders are not justified.

Curtin also revealed that there had to be a great expansion of Australia's aircraft industry. All our repair establishments were at present in settled areas. When Darwin became the base for offensive action northwards it would be impossible to fly planes far southwards for repairs. This program would tax Australia's resources in men and material very greatly. He said that the great Tocumwal air base which was designed for repair and refitting was now comparatively useless. It was built at a cost of £2 million and was decided on at a time before the Americans came here, and when defence of Australia on a line far south of the present defensive area was envisaged.

3 December 1942

The reason for the slowness of the Allied advance in New Guinea is that the Japanese are attaching greater importance to this area and are reinforcing strongly with troops taken from the Solomons. They have weakened themselves in the Solomons in order to strengthen New Guinea. The reason for this is that after New Guinea the Allies will attack Rabaul, which is a vital supply base for the Japanese. In addition, our supply problem is very difficult. In fact Curtin says that if the Japs had adequate strength in the air they might be able
to make it very difficult for us. The Japanese are also in control of the northern sea routes.

Replying to complaints of delay in the transmission of press cables, Curtin said that his own cables are held up in some cases by 28 hours. The congestion on the transmission lines both externally and internally was very great. [Postmaster-General] Ashley had told him he didn’t know how the Post Office was going to handle a flood of Christmas greetings.

7 December 1942

Curtin replied to whispered comment said to have come from Americans in Australia that Australian tank production was 'a joke'. Curtin read from a secret report dated 16 November which showed not only that remarkable progress had been made but that tanks were being made by Australians which were superior to Rommel’s, particularly in gunpower. The original tank production plan provided for the mounting of 2-pound guns. This was found to be insufficient, so 25-pound guns were now installed pending completion of tests for use of an even heavier gun. It had been found that little structural alteration to the turret was necessary to enable the Australian tank to accommodate these big guns. Moreover the turrets are completely reversible and the deflection angle of the guns makes the tanks extremely flexible in use. The report describes certain complaints about the tanks as being irresponsible. Tanks are now being produced at two main depots—Melbourne and Chullora.

After making his statement on the racing conference with Main (Australian Racing Club) and Turnbull (Victorian Racing Club), Curtin revealed what he meant by a 'series of malpractices which the clubs had difficulty in combating'. He said that since the stewards had lost their binoculars to the government, serious incidents were occurring in racing. The club officials told him that a horse and a jockey could have been killed in the Victoria Derby as a result of an attack by another rider. In the Williamstown Cup the jockey on the favourite had his foot kicked out of the stirrup and he was forced hard into the rails.
Instancing the difficulties of the New Guinea campaign, which is still going slowly, Curtin said that, of 1000 casualties which recently came out of New Guinea, 400 were action cases and 600 were suffering from malaria and dysentery. The Japs were also suffering seriously from illness but Curtin pointed out that they had a population of 140 million and could therefore stand their losses.

He said he could get out of his political difficulties over the militia if he kept the AIF entirely for use outside Australia. This would leave the militia, which had no battle experience, to fight in New Guinea, to garrison Darwin and to be used in places where the experience of the AIF was now a great advantage.

8 December 1942

Although Curtin said today that he had not discussed with the racing men last week the question of restricting the release of acceptances until half a hour before each race, I learn that he had been in correspondence with clubs previously on this proposal. My informant said it had been considered impracticable. One aspect was that it would have doubled the size of racebooks, thus consuming paper and using manpower.

Curtin said that we would have 200 Beauforts by the end of the year. The plans were for 30 a month and War Cabinet today looked at the possibility of substituting a more modern plane, but was not inclined to do so. It would mean considerable delay at a time when actual output was important.

Reciprocal lend-lease is giving the government some concern. Curtin said that the Americans now wanted to send our stuff anywhere at all. The original agreement was for assistance to the armed forces of America 'in Australia or its Territories and in such other cases as may be
Curtin says he does not mind it going to New Caledonia or even the Solomons but he does not like the idea of it going to Hawaii or even New Zealand. He is rather bitter on the subject of New Zealand and its lack of industries. He went through a long list of war materials we have supplied, ending with a statement that we supplied practically all the equipment for the New Zealand division abroad. He thinks the Americans are asking for more than they were supposed to get and more than their own government would expect or want. He is asking Sir Owen Dixon to check up on their authority, and also on their requirements.

While defending Dedman and complaining of the attacks regarding retail shops and domestics, Curtin mentioned that the retail stores are asking Copland for price increases on the ground that their heavy overhead has remained although they have only half the turnover. He has been told that Myers of Melbourne has refused to let their girls undertake war work, telling them that they would not get their jobs back if they left, even if they were standing idle now. Curtin remarked that a lot of women were doing some sort of war work, and thereby claiming the right to have domestics, merely because they wanted to go out instead of cooking their own and their families' breakfasts.

Referring to New Guinea, Curtin said that the delay at Buna-Gona, where the Japs are holding a strip of coastal swamp 500 yards by 200 yards, was due to the fact that the Americans could not fight. He said that the United States had sustained more naval losses in the Solomons, although nothing so serious as those of the Japs.

13 December 1942 Churchill assures Australia that if war ends first in Europe, British forces will be brought to Australia and the Pacific.

14 December 1942 Allied forces capture Buna.
14 December 1942

Churchill has agreed to the Australian Government’s representations for the return of the 9th Division from the Middle East. The actual transport must await arrangement of shipping. Churchill’s response to the request is stated to have been ‘most gracious’.

Curtin said today that we could take Buna immediately if we were prepared for 3000 to 5000 casualties. We were not, so we could go slowly and sensibly. Dead men were no use and Australians were not enlisted merely as cannon fodder.

He remarked that editors should act with great discretion about the 9th Division. (He may have remembered that the Daily Telegraph advocated the return of the AIF when it was known that the 6th and 7th were coming back—a typical Daily Telegraph stunt.)

The 9th is now in Palestine and Churchill believes that shipping will be available in January. Curtin read Churchill’s message which was very cordial. It mentioned that the 9th could be more readily spared because the New Zealand division was remaining in the Middle East. Churchill said the 9th would carry with them a splendid reputation and the honour of having played a leading part in the memorable victory for the Empire in a common cause.

Churchill also discussed a proposal to send two British armoured carriers to the Pacific to join the United States fleet. It was suggested that this would be done if the United States would send two carriers of the Ranger type (unarmoured, I think) to the Atlantic. The United States offers to keep one Ranger, and to take one British carrier. Curtin said that even if this were done, we would have two more carriers in the Pacific as a result of the move.

You will probably have realised that the source of the economic item relating to the Bank Board was from Curtin. He mentioned that the Bank Board was disappointed that the Premiers, apprehensive at the fate of the Bill, had deleted the proposed control of investment. ‘The old Tories in the Upper Houses,’ Curtin said, ‘who want to safeguard their own interests should listen to the Bank Board for a few days. They would soon see how their interests are going to be affected.’

The Commonwealth war expenditure for this year, budgeted for £440 million, is going to be £7 million higher!
That was one of the reasons for the Bank Board conference, but the PM would not hint at how it is going to be met. Even compulsory loans would not bridge that gap, and it is obvious from his later remarks that credit is going to be used a lot more.

The increase in war expenditure, he said, was due to a number of causes and one would indicate many related ways. American ships damaged in the Solomons were being repaired here and we were paying all costs and wages. For this we got a credit in reverse lend-lease. The government was also much more readily, and for longer periods, commandeering all or most of the civil planes. Use of them for the transport of soldiers and urgent freight was extremely costly.

Sir Campbell Stuart68 said today that announcements from the communications conference which might last until the end of the year would be made by the government.

15 December 1942

Curtin has had a message from the British Government requesting that Australian editors be asked in confidence not to play up or amplify stories relating to the unshackling of prisoners of war. A similar request has gone to United Kingdom editors. The British Government asks editors to be particularly careful not to point to our virtue in this matter in comparison with the acts of the enemy.

The government has some anxiety that too much talk might lead the Germans into a decision not to follow our lead in unshackling war prisoners. Curtin's private view is that the British Government has acted very foolishly over this question. The British Government was not entirely blameless in the matter of shackling war prisoners.

68 Sir Campbell Stuart was chairman of the Imperial Communications Advisory Committee.
17 December 1942

Curtin is extremely worried over the shipping position. He read a very illuminating cable from London on the subject. He said losses in recent months 'beggared description'. British and Allied ships lost through enemy action in November totalled 115 representing a tonnage of 695,000. Losses through enemy action of British, Allied and neutral ships since war broke out total 3634, representing a tonnage of 15,710,732. Those lost through ordinary marine risks total 1011 (1,964,796 tons), or a total of 4645 ships (17,675,528 tons). Losses in the Pacific since Japan entered the war total 388 (1,292,520 tons)

Losses in all theatres this year excluding naval losses are:

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<th>Month</th>
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<td>January</td>
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<td>February</td>
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<td>April</td>
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Curtin said that Churchill had these losses in mind when he said recently that the submarine menace was not decreasing but was growing.

Curtin had a report from W.S. Robinson, a Melbourne financial expert who has been working for the government and who had returned from America a few days ago. The report shows that the United States production program is in a state of chaos. According to Robinson, production plans have never been laid. Somebody tells Roosevelt that 25,000 planes are needed and Roosevelt tells somebody, 'OK, build 25,000 planes.' Then somebody says the number should be 40,000 planes and Roosevelt says, 'OK, build 40,000 planes.' No production schedules or planned output can therefore be achieved.

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69 William Sydney Robinson (1876-1963); Managing Director, Zinc Corporation, 1926-47. During World War II, Robinson acted without an official title as advisor to the government on international trade issues, especially minerals.
Robinson's views corroborate those of A.E. Monk\textsuperscript{70} who, after a careful inspection of American factories from a workman's point of view, found a great deal to be desired. Robinson's report states that there is no dovetailing of factory planning. Factories may be placed where it is difficult to get manpower or machinery or material. He found there was no organising anywhere comparable with that in Australia. The bad American situation was the reason why Oliver Lyttelton\textsuperscript{71} had to go to the United States. Britain has now reached her maximum in output and Britain must look forward to American industry to carry on. Further output in Britain is impossible because of fatigue, the fact that there is
no night production now because of a complete blackout, and from other causes. Lloyd George\textsuperscript{72} has told the British Government after a survey of the coalmining industry that if the miners could achieve the output of 1933, Britain would not only have sufficient coal, but would have a surplus. Curtin says that Britain expects further bombing but the government cannot say when it will start.

The North African campaign has exceeded expectations in all phases excepting shipping losses. These losses stand in the way of full capitalisation of the gains which have been made. In the United States the whole focus of press and administration is on North Africa again. Curtin would not say whether this was at the expense of the Pacific.

\textbf{18 December 1942} Russia’s entry into the war as an ally reverses opposition to the Communist Party and the ban on the party is lifted.

\textbf{19 December 1942} British troops advance into Burma.

\textbf{19 December 1942}

Latest reports on the North African fighting paint a different picture from those which the government received earlier. Advice from the British Government is that caution should be maintained with regard to the position in Tunisia, and our advance in Libya should not be allowed to make comment on Tunisia less reserved. It is especially important, the British Government emphasises, to present the African fighting as a single unit. In Tunisia we have suffered a setback, and exaggerated reports, such as that which stated that a conference had taken place at First Army Headquarters to fix details of the final phase of the assault on Tunis, are misleading.

The First Army’s plan was to push forward at high speed and seize important airfields in the vicinity of Tunis and Bizerta so that they could be used by our fighters. Some initial success was gained at Medjez el Bab. The Germans however were putting in as many troops as they could and were soon strong enough to launch a counter-attack in some strength, well supported in the air. This succeeded so well that our aerodrome at Medjez el Bab was neutralised and we were driven out of Tebourba and

\textsuperscript{72} David Lloyd George (1863–1945); United Kingdom Prime Minister, 1916–22; Liberal MP during World War II.
the part of Djedeida that we had occupied. We are now temporarily on the defensive and are without adequate air support from short-range fighters.

Reasons for the failure of our plan are:

**Poorness of communications:** There is a single railway track which has prevented our bringing up sufficient equipment, anti-aircraft guns, etc to maintain our advanced air base at Medjez el Bab. We have so far managed to get into action only part of our force, supported by some United States tanks and industry. (These forces have been depleted by losses in action.)

**Our ships were loaded so that fighting material had priority over Air Force supplies:** The decision to give fighting material priority was correct, based on the assumption that there would be opposition to our landing, but it meant that Air Force maintenance had to yield priority.

**Speed with which the Germans got troops into Tunisia:** These are continuing to come in spite of losses. It is estimated that there are now between 20,000 and 30,000 enemy troops in Tunisia. The enemy also holds an inherent advantage in the matter of airfields.

In Russia the situation is relatively unchanged. An important point is, however, that last winter the Germans were able to take soldiers off the Russian front and put them into the factories, thereby increasing production. This winter, however, the Russians are holding down all German forces at the front.

**21 December 1942**

Behind Curtin's statement last week on a national government and his determination to proceed with the domestic servants ban lies an interesting situation which may yet make political headlines. The evidence of the influences working behind the scenes is, as yet, not strong enough to form definite political moves but there is no doubt that they are at work.

Curtin's statement on national government was made out of the blue. Public discussion of it had died down, and there was no outward reason for him to make it. But
it was intended to let those interests which are flirting with the question know that their efforts had not been unnoticed. The Sunday Telegraph's 'Political Roundabout' last Sunday went as close as it could to 'point the bone' at Evatt. There is evidence that Evatt's ambitions, always strong, are at work again. Curtin's supporters say with certainty, but as yet without evidence, that Evatt has discussed the question of leading a national government in an off-hand way with some members of the Opposition. He knows that Curtin would not lead a national government, and that in the event of such a government being forced would give way to some other leader. Evatt hopes that he would fit the bill.

But in this the opinion is he is showing the same political inexperience which has characterised many of his actions since he entered the Federal Parliament. Firstly, he could not secure a reversal of Caucus' decision last year against a national government. Secondly, to precipitate one, he would have to break with the Labor Party in an open scheme with the Opposition. There is
no evidence that he has any other support within the Labor Party. For that matter, there is not much evidence of Evatt's activities, but gossip and whispers on the subject are thick in Canberra.

On the servants ban Evatt has fallen foul of Curtin. Evatt himself assisted in the framing of Regulation 59 under the National Security Act which authorised the transfer of many classes of employee under the rationalisation plans which have been going on for some months. The movement of domestic servants was proposed under this order. Evatt was not at the War Cabinet meeting which discussed the situation last week. He had an agenda, so he must have known it was on. Also there is said to be no reason why he could not have attended the Cabinet meeting. Curtin's supporters say that, by casting doubts on their own regulations, the Attorney-General's Department has openly admitted their legal inefficiency.

Evatt's friends say that Curtin committed an indiscretion by not waiting until Evatt was present before proceeding with the domestics question, as Cabinet decisions are technically unanimous. Evatt would have had to come into the open to oppose the regulations had he been present. Now in the event of any breach he can say that the decision was made when he was away. Curtin himself, at an interview, hinted that legal officers can express all sorts of opinions if such opinions are suggested to them. Evatt is a strange personality and those who know him are seeking some other reason for his attitude over the servants ban, in itself a small thing. Observers in Canberra are awaiting the events of the next few weeks and the reassembly of Members for the January session before attempting to sort out political undercurrents.

I thought the above explanation was necessary to enable you to form an opinion on some of the happenings of the past few days which may have raised some enquiries in your mind. I feel I should add something which should have been included earlier.

The mystery surrounding Evatt's moves has been heightened by his stand at a recent meeting of his Electoral Council (Barton): Lang's Century reports it at length. It reveals that a resolution was carried.
supporting statements (not revealed) made by Evatt at the meeting and suggesting that he should replace Forde as Army Minister. It also recommends that, at the special conference which the Lang people are seeking on the militia issue, Evatt should be asked to repeat what he had told the Electoral Council meeting (still unrevealed). You should read the report yourself.

22 December 1942  Commonwealth Department of Post-war Reconstruction is established—a program of social security and reform is set in motion

30 December 1942

Curtin gave us an end-of-the-year summing-up of the position which indicated our limitations in disheartening fashion and which included a statement that Australia was Churchill’s ‘forgotten land’. There is pretty clear evidence that American politics are coming into the question of aid for us.

Curtin was asked about the naval position north of New Guinea, and he responded by saying that the question of air transport was worrying him, particularly at present. We had been promised 18 planes, and in view of that we had diverted our civil planes elsewhere for the time being. Now the promised 18 transports were not coming because of the demands of other fronts. One of the minor consequences was that the boys in Darwin would receive their Christmas mail 10 days late.

Curtin said: ‘Apart from the planes in North Africa and on the Russian front, 270 planes went over Europe last night, but by Christ you can’t get any here. They are over places which could be left alone without it mattering for two months.’

Allied Works men, he said, had just completed an aerodrome at Norfolk Island (the first ever built there) and the Americans would name and use it. The workers would return to Australia and this brought him to the statement that the manpower position in this country was at present infinitely more acute than in Great Britain, where there was a vast standing army that could be used for a dozen purposes. We also had an army, but it was standing at remote places, which had to be guarded constantly. The men could not be released for other duties.
Going back to the promised 18 planes, Curtin said that even if they had not been promised, he would still have agreed to the diversion of the civil planes. Without those aircraft we could not have got tanks and other things where we need them. The civil planes, however, were now just about 'punctured' and we had lost some of them.

At this stage he remarked that this country was Churchill's forgotten land, and pointed out that Hanson Baldwin that morning had returned to the theme of the holding war.

'If we could get 400 or 500 extra planes in this country, it would represent a very small diminution of the combined strength of the air forces in the war against Hitler, but it would make an enormous difference in the striking power of the United Nations in the war against Japan. I warned you how American eyes would be fascinated by the concentration of the confounded stunt press of that country on the epochal achievements of the American forces in North Africa. There are no achievements yet, but they have a commander there who, unlike MacArthur, is not a Republican. The American Government does not want MacArthur to be too great a man.'

Curtin said he had sent for Drakeford to spend Christmas here discussing the matter. He was going to do some scrapping in the next two or three weeks (presumably in Washington and London).

The Americans want to keep the Ranger (carrier) in the Pacific, but one British carrier is being sent to the Pacific, so that the plan of two extra carriers will be carried out.

Going back to the position of Australia, Curtin said it was the proper fate of any country which did not build its own defences and therefore could not logically look to anybody else. It was also the proper fate for a country that thought it could fight anybody's war before it made its position safe.

Making it clear that he is putting the pressure on, Curtin said he had mentioned 500 planes, but even 200 of various types would do. With our new aerodromes in the north he could, by this relatively great increase in our air strength, find some compensation for the absence of naval strength in the north. Such a number of planes would also make it difficult for the Japanese naval strength to come

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74 Hanson Baldwin (born 1903), military editor of the New York Times during World War II.
in on North New Guinea where we now had bases available which would reduce the travelling for the planes doing the jobs. The planes which we had left were not nearly so efficient as they were, because they had been fighting to death.

Curtin said: 'I can see all the possibility of straightening the line with 200 more planes. We could clear New Guinea and with the present Jap strength in Timor they could be driven out of there as well.'

He was asked if China was getting the planes she wanted and he said China was being treated like the rest of the Pacific. He was not surprised that Calcutta had been bombed. The range of the enemy was shortening from Tokyo and other places nearer to home. The Japs, therefore, were cracking wherever they could get. The Japs were pretty strong in Thailand, where they had now had their bases for a whole year and had developed them all the time as part of the consolidating process.

The Japs were also frightened that air power would develop in India and do a lot of damage to them in Burma, which was presenting fictitious strength. They were also working hard to keep in the Solomons.

The American air power and our own were getting exhausted, and the superiority of our airmen was now the real and only measure of superiority. Curtin said he had in mind the replacement of the forces in New Guinea. Something had to be done to give them the chance to build up vitality, and that could be done only by pulling them out. In New Guinea at present there were 50,000 of our men and 20,000 Americans. They had been fighting, which also had to be taken into account. A substantial amount of shipping, which was not now available, would be needed for the operation. When he had asked United States Admiral Carpender for 100 or 50,000 tons of shipping, he had thought of this operation as well as a movement of forces to Timor. Forces could not be moved in merchantmen without naval protection and a good air umbrella.

Curtin said: 'The enemy has all the good anchorages on the north. We might have to try another Gallipoli landing by barges on the south coast which is not so good. In the meantime, there are buggers in Australia who won't work. Coal mines are idle, and everyone is thinking about holidays just at a time when a few extra tons in our war

75 Vice-Admiral Arthur S. Carpender, US Navy; Commander, Allied Naval Forces, South-West Pacific Area, 1942-43; Commander, Seventh Fleet, South-West Pacific Area, 1943.
effort would have a crucial effect. We are like people who have got contagion out of the house and just over the back fence. Apparently we are not worrying how dirty the yard is.'

The manpower problem arose in part from the necessity of replacing men who were exhausted. They could not be replaced by men from the fixed defences because if any of those defences were bypassed the enemy could do irreparable damage in certain parts of the country.

Curtin said it was useless addressing questions to Churchill and Roosevelt. They had made their minds up that if the British Empire in the Far East had to go, then it had to go. The only part which had not gone was Australia. New Zealand could not go until we went, although it might be in danger if the Japs took the Solomons and Midway. New Caledonia, incidentally, now had an aerodrome—but no planes.

Curtin is strongly opposing Roosevelt's wish to replace Nelson Johnson as Minister to Australia. He did not disclose the name of the new nominee. He said however that he was chairman of the Democratic Party, and was recently involved in 'some municipal business—the governorship of New York—which is all pretty slick'. Continuing, Curtin said: 'I'm not having him. I have not the final say, but I don't think it would be a good appointment. Roosevelt wants to give him the rank of ambassador. There is a full-page picture and story about the guy in the current issue of Life. He lost prestige when he backed the wrong Democratic candidate for the governorship. The other candidate won.'

Returning to Churchill and Roosevelt, Curtin said he was fed up with the way these two men played ball with one another, quite regardless of the world at large. India was one example. He knew now why Cripps had left the War Cabinet while still being willing to do a job of work.

In view of the strain Japan had suffered in the last six months there was no doubt that now was the time to push in—just while they were stretched they could be pushed back a long way. Indeed it seemed that she would be allowed to go back just slightly herself, with just sufficient holding force to find herself increasingly strong only three-quarters of the way back.

Curtin said: 'I don't know what they are thinking about for their rubber supplies, even for the European war. There
is not too much. At the same time the long haulage of petrol to Australia could be greatly lessened if they would only put in that extra strength quickly. To produce another static war in the north of New Guinea and Timor, with the Japs in command of all the sea lanes, is too bad. It will enormously increase our casualties.'

Curtin said it was being proposed to publish in due course the total casualties of the war. ‘They’ wanted to group them under such headings as ‘Dominions’. If any announcement of that kind were made he would publish the Australian casualties to show the proportion of our losses.

Curtin said that a division of Americans, mostly suffering from malaria, would soon be in Sydney. He said this could not be avoided because of Sydney’s size and proximity to the battle fronts. Already bomb-battered ships from the Solomons had arrived in Sydney for repairs. He said it was a miracle that some had arrived at all, so badly damaged were they.

Referring to the communications conference to open in Sydney next Monday, Curtin was critical of the Australian Associated Press, which he described as a monopoly. He said that Reuters wanted to bring a service into Australia but AAP was opposing it. He believed in the freedom of the press. He did not feel disposed to deny access to a company representative of a friendly power. He said he was quite satisfied, however, that the cable charges were too high.

1 January 1943

During his comment on the suggestion from London by a newspaper commentator that a British Minister might be sent to Australia, Curtin revealed that he had already broached this subject some months ago.

He discussed the matter with the Governor-General and with the British High Commissioner, Sir Ronald Cross.77 Cross threatened to resign because he said the proposal was a demonstration of want of confidence in him and reflected on his ability. However he changed his mind and, according to Curtin, decided to await a more favourable opportunity. Three Australian Ministers have gone to Britain since the outbreak of war—Menzies, Page78 and Evatt. When Whitehall suggested that other...
Ministers might visit England, Curtin’s view was that Duff Cooper⁷⁹ had made a trip out to the East as a British Minister, and there was nothing to prevent another Minister coming out to Australia.

The whole question is tied up with the relationship between Australia and Britain. The article upon which Curtin commented was sent out by Trevor Smith, representative in London of the Herald cable service. The article was not factual and was unhelpful and Curtin hinted that, as had happened on previous occasions, a suggestion came from Australia (presumably from Murdoch) for the basis of the article.

Since his last talk with us, Curtin has heard from Lieutenant General Sturdee⁸⁰ in Washington. Sturdee states that there are tens of thousands of tons of material on the west coast of America awaiting shipment to the Pacific theatre. The fact is, however, that there are no ships available. Sturdee confirmed previous reports which Curtin received of confusion in the United States war effort. Sturdee said that the degree of organisation was nowhere near that of Australia.

This information was provided by Curtin during the discussion that produced his statement on Pacific war strategy. He thought a long time before making the statement and he subsequently had a second talk with us on the distance we could travel in commenting on his statement. He said that politics and the United States war effort walked hand in hand. They were inseparable. Since his statement that Roosevelt wanted to appoint the chairman of the Democratic Party, Flynn,⁸¹ as ambassador to Australia he had been further pressed by Roosevelt. Now he has been obliged to accept Flynn. He is very downcast about it, realising the impact which American politics is having on the organisation of the war. He had a wire from Sir Owen Dixon intimating that Sumner Welles⁸² had called on him and put the view that the President would be deeply offended if Australia objected to Flynn. Curtin said he could do nothing other than accept. Nelson Johnson has been of great help to Australia, but apparently his politics are wrong from Roosevelt’s point of view, and he is now to be replaced.

14 January 1943 Churchill and Roosevelt meet at Casablanca conference, and demand unconditional surrender of Axis powers.
15 January 1943

Curtin saw General Blamey today and had a long conference with him on the position in the north. Curtin said that we did not have the strength to do more than we were now doing. It would be sheer suicide to attempt anything more. Any further land operations, with the single exception of Lae, could not be undertaken because we did not have the strength, particularly at sea. We also needed a great increase in air power, but we could get by with what we have by straining all our resources which, however, were badly in need of relief. The first necessity was to relieve the men who are now in New Guinea. The 9th Division which will be coming back from the Middle East will not be here for a couple of months, and when they do arrive they will need refreshment and training.

Curtin said: 'We would be in a pretty pickle if the AIF had not come back. If they had gone to Burma or to some other places that were mentioned, this country could well have been lost."

He doubted whether any other government in the world had the slightest conception of the type of war that was being waged in New Guinea. Troops who had fought in other fields acknowledged that New Guinea was the worst place they had had to fight in.

The Japanese still held command of all the sea approaches to the islands adjacent to Australia. A sound policy for Australia to pursue was to regard those places as the outer fringe of our defences, and to hope that the Japanese would continue to come forward and suffer losses. However, another angle to that, Mr Curtin said, was that while he would lose ships and aircraft we would lose what we did not have a great abundance of, namely manpower. In a nutshell, we had to accept literally as a reality what was called a holding war. This would save our cities from ravage, but the war would be fought sufficiently close to Australia to enable us to maintain supplies, which was a very difficult problem having regard to our resources.

Curtin said that he had discussed with Blamey the problem of getting support for this country. He even suggested that Blamey himself might visit Washington
and London. Blamey said, however, that he thought this would be of no more use than the steps already taken, which he said had been as good as could be taken. Australia, he said, was up against the fact that the Great Powers had sealed their strategy to wage war in Europe, even though this policy had been laid down before Japan had manifested her strength. Blamey said the Great Powers had been very ready to take a great proportion of our manpower, and it had been difficult to get our forces back.

Blamey said we had given all our ships and many of our men to the RAF. It was now clear that this country could not spare anything. Australia must have a paramount regard to its own safety. Blamey also said that he doubted whether any nation could show a better result than the Commonwealth in its war organisation. He expressed the view that Great Britain had saved the world. It was still the only nation prepared to go on fighting for any issue other than its own security.

Curtin said he asked Blamey whether it would be any use asking Sir John Dill to come out to Australia. Blamey said no. They had also discussed sending MacArthur back to the United States to try and get a change of view there on the needs of the Pacific, but they reached the view that this would be construed in America as providing some sort of a stunt for the benefit of the Republicans. They agreed it would be no good having anybody come to Australia, or for anybody to go to Britain or America because the Allied strategy had been sealed.

Curtin recalled that he had asked for sea power in the Pacific. That had been 'bowled over'. He then asked for air reinforcements with a similar result. Then he asked for three divisions of Americans and the result had again been the same. In any case, he said, America did not have the ships to transport three divisions. The Allies at present did not have enough air power to carry out the 'island to island' advance to Tokyo. Neither were there the necessary ships. The Allies in every island would come against defensive positions and therefore they would have to be very strong. Nothing could be achieved until the Great Powers sent enough strength into the Pacific to defeat the Japanese Navy in a major battle. Until then, we had to hold on.

83 Field Marshal Sir John Dill (1881–1944), Chief of Imperial General Staff; Head of British Joint Staff Mission; Washington.
Turning to Australia itself, Mr Curtin said difficult though our transport problems now were, they would be still more difficult because we would have to move supplies from the south to the north in increasing quantities. With some warmth Curtin said he was not going to think of elections or any such 'hugger mugger'. He was going to stay where he was while he could and apply himself to the task in front of him.

He said that battle casualties in New Guinea since the start of the campaign had been about 4000. There had also been 17,000 cases of sickness. Curtin said that Blamey felt that the Japs' march south had been halted, and he felt we could hold them where they were. It would be necessary to postpone any move against Rabaul until Lae had been taken and that was going to be a long job. The Papuan situation could have been cleaned up if we had been able to get more artillery north of the Owen Stanley Range. As we could not do so, we were taking the campaign slowly to keep down the cost.

Curtin summed up his talk with Blamey by saying that he had not been disquieted but the going would be very tough, and no relaxation of our burdens could be permitted. Manpower particularly was a serious matter, and in this regard he mentioned that he had been concerned by information from Britain that her manpower was becoming exhausted and she would have to commence large-scale diversionary moves to secure manpower.

Regarding Tunisia, Curtin said the campaign was going to be a long one. Rommel had gone back also to a point where he could be supplied.

Curtin criticised a statement by the Lord Mayor of Melbourne and said he wondered why some newspaper hadn’t taken it up. The Lord Mayor was reported to have said that three places he would like to see bombed were the fish markets, the iron building near the GPO, and the Spencer Street railway station. Curtin described this statement as a first-class piece of stupidity. Spencer Street station, nerve centre of our transport system, was the last place he wanted to see bombed.

84 Sir Thomas Sydney Nettlefold (1879-1956), Lord Mayor of Melbourne, 1942-45.

17 January 1943 A domestic servants ban is introduced providing for the employment of only one domestic servant per household.
18 January 1943

Mr Curtin said today that he had sent out telegrams to members of the Press Censorship Committee inviting them to attend a meeting in Canberra on Thursday.

Mr Curtin revealed that the United States is sending out to Australia an army commander of staff and an admiral with amphibian experience. He did not know whether to hope that this might be a prelude to an increase in American strength in this area.

His latest information is that the enemy is consolidating in the outer screen of islands around Australia. However, the experts think that the extreme bombing range of the Japanese from an effective military viewpoint is the 20th parallel which runs through north Australia. No further major effort by the Allies could be expected for some little time in this area, Mr Curtin said. After every big movement it was necessary to reinforce and establish forces and this took time. The 9th Division was not expected back for some time, and it would take between two and three months from the present time to get them into fighting shape again.

19 January 1943

The meeting of the Press Censorship Committee set down for Thursday has been postponed indefinitely through the inability of some members to attend. The American tanker *Mobil Fuel* has been torpedoed 40 miles off Sydney. It was returning to America after having discharged at Sydney. The tanker *Fort Franklin* is also believed to have been lost because air reconnaissance has located a number of lifeboats containing men about the area where the vessel was last reported. She was on her way to Sydney with a cargo of oil.

The *Balboa*, another tanker on the way to Sydney from America, is overdue and although it is only a matter of hours since she last reported, it is feared that she also has been lost. The censorship authorities have been asked by the Prime Minister to move the United States and naval authorities with a view to getting early release of the story.

After publication of the *New York Times* story of the proposal to set up an Allied Associate War Council of the United States, Britain, China and Russia, Curtin cabled Sir Owen Dixon in Washington for information. Dixon saw
Lord Halifax\(^{85}\) who said he knew nothing of it but would have further enquiries made. Halifax said he thought the story was improbable, and that it was probably inspired by Chinese sources.

The situation in China is not very satisfactory. There is evidence that the puppet government set up by the Japanese is making some progress. There is a possibility that the Chinese are not as wedded to Chiang Kai-shek's\(^{86}\) cause as they were. In a cable from Chungking, Sir Frederick Eggleston\(^ {87}\) said he was rather worried about the position. He thought there was a possibility that the Japanese and puppet troops would disregard military considerations and concentrate on putting Chungking out of action.

Conversations are proceeding 'at very close quarters' at the present moment between Churchill and Roosevelt. Curtin would say no more about it. He thought, however, that the discussions surrounded the political situation in North Africa. This involved a decision over the role of the Free French.

Asked whether some move might be made at this meeting to 'unseal' the sealed Pacific strategy, Curtin said he did not know this, but added: 'I am taking a hand in the conversations.'

**20 January 1943**

Curtin said today that another ship, the steamer *Kalingo*, had been lost off Sydney at about the same spot where the other sinkings took place. The *Kalingo* was a cargo vessel of about 7000 tons. She had discharged at Sydney and was returning, it is believed, to America with a cargo of food.

Curtin said that all his submissions were in the right hands for consideration by Churchill and Roosevelt at their meetings. He had no further information.

Curtin revealed that the 'highest influences' were behind the proposed Dominion Trade Union Congress. Bruce communicated the details of the proposal to him.

**22 January 1943** Japanese resistance ends in Papua.
22 January 1943

There are three submarines operating off the New South Wales coast. One was seen off Wollongong today. As you probably know, the vessel which was torpedoed recently, and news of which was announced a couple of days ago, was the Kalingo. The Mobil Oob (or Orb), earlier described in Sydney as the Mobil Fuel, has arrived in Sydney, badly damaged by a torpedo. Five were killed. Efforts are now being made to secure release of the story. The Fort Franklin, previously reported as overdue, has arrived safely. The Balboa is still overdue, despite reports yesterday that she had arrived.

23 January 1943 Rommel’s retreating forces are pursued into Tunisia

25 January 1943

The American steamer Peter H. Burnett (7000 tons) has been torpedoed 420 miles from Sydney.

Curtin said today that he did not think that even Churchill’s War Cabinet knows of Churchill’s meeting with Roosevelt, which is now taking place. Curtin said he had this from the best source. He thought it was a poor commentary on the democratic war organisation when Churchill and Roosevelt met to discuss major strategy apparently without Cabinet direction. He said Bruce had picked up word of the meeting from some undisclosed source.

28 January 1943

The story sent today on the Japanese concentrations north of Australia was based on an operational report read by Curtin at his press conference.

The report said that, apart from building up their air strength, the enemy had increased the tempo of their movement in the northwest sector. There is considerable movement in Batavia and it is suggested that the enemy has moved men down from Malaya. Some men have come straight from Japan. Japanese headquarters are being moved from Batavia to Amboina which has been in
the news recently as a result of Allied bombing attacks. Advanced parties of the enemy have already arrived in this area. Twelve merchantmen were sighted at Ambonina on 20 January. A high-ranking Japanese officer has come to Ambonina to superintend operations. All this, the report stated, means that some major move is contemplated. No naval strength has been sighted, but this could be moved down quickly when other preparations have been completed.

One division or more of crack troops have arrived in Ambonina. There is increased activity along the south coast of Dutch New Guinea. New aerodromes have been built at Kaukanau and Agatz, and the runway at Bofo has been extended. A 900-ton whale factory ship has been sighted. The Japanese are known to be using these for the transport of planes and fuel.

Curtin suggests underlining the significance of Blamey's recent statement that Australia was not yet out of the woods. He also expressed the view that the fact that the Japs had been outfought in New Guinea would lead them to bring in their best troops for the next effort.

29 January 1943  British 8th Army enters Tripoli
1–9 February 1943  Japanese evacuate Guadalcanal
2 February 1943  Germans surrender in Stalingrad

2 February 1943

Curtin remarked that he wished he could get £500,000 without it having to appear on the estimates. He said he would spend it in America, not through the obvious propaganda channels, in reinforcing his plea for aid.

He was asked if any suggestion had ever been made for a conference of Pacific leaders. He said it had not, and requested that the matter should not be raised as it might suggest that the United Nations was getting away from the conception of a global war. He added that he had been surprised and delighted at the amount of help being given Russia.

Curtin called in Drakeford regarding the plane seen over Sydney and Newcastle which he thought earlier in
the week was an enemy on reconnaissance. He said he did not now believe it was an enemy plane, but a Douglas flying from Brisbane to Sydney some five or six hours late. It reached Mascot in the early morning. It had been picked out by searchlights, and did not have floats. He started to make a public statement in view of Heffron’s claim that too much was being kept back, that the rumour of an enemy plane was incorrect, and then decided to defer it.

Curtin embarked on a long and rambling discourse after being asked to comment on the Opposition criticism of the omission of Malaya from the South-West Pacific area. From another source I learn that few if any AIF are still in Malaya and Singapore—they have been taken north. Curtin said that in the first place Malaya was not in the official South-West Pacific area, which, of course, was very different from the South-West Pacific militia area. Wavell was in charge of the area which included Malaya, but MacArthur with his naval power, if any, was in charge of the sea off Malaya.

Curtin continued that he was personally very disappointed that New Zealand was not in the area, and he also thought that New Caledonia should be in it. The line cut through Lord Howe and Norfolk Islands, but that would not affect the right under the Defence Act as it now stands to send militia there if necessary.

‘When the time comes for the documents to be shown,’ Curtin said, ‘it will be revealed that the limitation in the Bill adequately covers any contribution Australia can make in the war against Japan while the war with Hitler is in progress. The Casablanca discussions, which included a tremendous amount of operational stuff, mean that we will be at war in the Pacific when we have ceased to be at war anywhere else.’

Curtin went on that it was still a holding war in the Pacific and the questions in the criticism of the militia proposal therefore did not arise. They were all unreal. The area in the Bill did not coincide with the official South-West Pacific area because the manpower of this country was not capable of providing any contribution beyond the area shown in the Bill. Actually our manpower was sufficient only for the defence of this country and the islands vital to it. A major war could not be conducted
against Japan by Australia. Greece, Belgium, Norway—countries with similar populations to Australia and far smaller areas to defend—had not been able to stand up against major powers.

In any event, the war with Japan was basically a naval and air war, and Japan would never be defeated until she had been overcome in a major naval engagement. If New Zealand had been put in our area it would have meant that the United States would have handed over a large part of naval power to us. That might have been useful, but America was not likely to have agreed. It was because of our manpower position that he had sought to bring all the AIF back to Australia.

Curtin said he could not imagine this country ever finding more than five divisions for service outside Australia. To send even that number would mean an extraordinary number of ships, supplies, reinforcements and maintenance units. Curtin said he would read all the cables to War Council on Tuesday, but he could not possibly read them to Parliament. He was a bit worried about what to say to Parliament.

Running off at a tangent, he said that Russia, which was fighting nowhere outside Russia, was getting more planes in a week than we got in almost a year. They were of course doing a useful job. He had to recognise that when MacArthur was sent here it was stated that the intention was to hold Australia and, whatever had happened, Australia had been held. He realised the pleas going constantly on behalf of Russia and China, which probably had stronger claims than Australia.

On the other hand we were the only white race in the southern hemisphere, and almost the only Empire country doing anything. South Africa had contributed nothing to naval strength, and neither had Canada. Canada, with 11 million people, had experienced
a war boom, which had been aided by the fact that
Empire air trainees were doing their training there.
Canada's troops were not fighting anywhere. The former
High Commissioner, Odium, had said he was ashamed
that his country was doing nothing, and had gone home
to try and get a division to assist in guarding Australia.
He had failed and had not returned here.

Reverting to the war, Curtin said it would outlast him,
and a good many other people. He was asked if he meant
it would outlast him politically, or in fact. He did not
answer directly, but pointed out that he had been leader
of a party for 7 1/2 years, a fact which meant a bit of
a strain.

Curtin said: 'Look at Churchill. He has only to consider
higher strategy. I have other jobs. Even though Chifley
spares me as much as possible, he has to tell me the
details of taxes and the financial position so I can speak
about them. Churchill knows and cares nothing about the
economic position—he leaves all that to the Chancellor.
I am asked about racing, or what has happened to Rowell
(a dig at the Melbourne Herald rep who asks every day)
or any one of a multitude of things. This must mean that
I do not do my more important jobs so well. It sometimes
happens that I should have given more consideration
to a phrase in a cable. It is necessary to think of
temperaments. Now and again I talk too bluntly perhaps.
Nothing should be said impatiently or intolerantly.'

Turning to the Melbourne Herald man he said, 'And
I don't want Sir Keith to tell me that the remedy is to
bring in some of the boys from the Opposition side.
They are no more competent than ours. Some of them
may be better than my tail, but whom could I push off War
Cabinet with any advantage to the conduct of the war?
You may say that Drakeford is colourless, but he had a bad
time first with an inheritance his predecessor was not
game to tackle, and is now doing an excellent job. You
may say that Makin is a good Methodist preacher, but
he is a very good Minister. The Army is a hell of a job at
any time.'

Curtin said that the Army was badly administered. This
was to be expected because the men in charge had been
lawyers and shearers and clerks a few years ago.
4 February 1943

The story in the Daily Telegraph that certain Opposition members of the War Council had described reports of Japanese concentrations in the north as 'all hooey' has started something which may have important results. The statement was made by McEwen and Menzies, Menzies supplying the 'all hooey' part. The Telegraph was afraid of it and pulled it out after the first edition.

Yesterday's interview with Curtin was a tense one. He had the cutting from the Daily Telegraph and relevant War Council documents before him. He opened out on the Telegraph man and, addressing everybody, said that if his information was not believed he could serve no purpose by continuing to give it. He was very angry, but quietened down towards the end of the interview.

I am convinced of the truth of the stories put out by the government if the documents I have seen are genuine, and I have not the slightest reason for considering that they are not genuine. The story that was written last Thursday from Canberra, telling of new Japanese concentrations, was followed up, if you remember, by the off-the-record background giving place names and details omitted from the story for security reasons. All of us at Thursday's interview saw the operational document (original) from MacArthur, as we have seen similar documents in the past.

Curtin yesterday was strongly critical of the War Council member who made the statement to the Daily Telegraph. At Tuesday's War Council meeting all the documents relating to the latest Japanese move were available. These documents are circulated continuously among members of the War Council, and the Oppositionists get exact duplicates of those that go to Ministers.
Curtin said the present battle in the Solomons was part of the result of the Japanese concentrations. He deplored the effect on public morale which such statements as that attributed to Opposition War Councillors made. Fadden, Hughes and Spender\(^2\) were emphatic in disassociating themselves from what the \textit{Telegraph} said.

The story which gave rise to the references in Parliament yesterday was mine. The \textit{Canberra Times} was branded by Opposition critics seeking information from the government. A duplicate of this story went to all my papers. There was a strong feeling in the Gallery, however, that Curtin by his answers left the roundsmen 'holding the bag'. He said that the story 'did not conform to the facts as I know them, but the purport is true'. There was some resentment in the Gallery over this answer and a meeting of senior roundsmen was called during the afternoon to consider what further action might be taken to convey our annoyance to Curtin. The meeting adjourned to a later date without reaching a decision. However, news of it was conveyed unofficially to Curtin. He replied through his press secretary to the effect that he hadn't said exactly what he intended to say. Despite annoyance over this incident, all the roundsmen are convinced that Curtin had not overstressed the Jap danger in the north.

Important military changes are pending. General Stantke\(^3\) is being sent from Victoria Barracks to an operational post. Lieutenant General Rowell, who was sent back from New Guinea for crossing swords with Blamey, will be posted to a station with the rank of colonel. Curtin said this is not a reduction in rank as he was only acting at the higher rank in New Guinea.

Communications between Perth and the eastern States will shortly be interrupted for several days. This indicates the return of more Australians from the Middle East. Curtin asked 'for God's sake' to keep quiet about this because of the grave danger to the returning men.

\(^2\) Percy Spender (1897-1985), UAP/Liberal MHR for Warringah (NSW), 1935–51; Treasurer, 1940; member, Advisory War Council, 1940–45.

\(^3\) Major General Victor Stantke (1886-1967), Adjutant-General, Army Headquarters, Melbourne, 1940–43.

8 February 1943

The steamer \textit{Iron Knight} (4800 tons) was torpedoed today off Gabo. Curtin wanted to make the announcement immediately but the Navy refused.
It appears that the submarine responsible is outside wireless range with its nearest supply ship or depot. The enemy therefore does not know where it is and the Navy is hopeful of getting it before the enemy can send it supplies. It is not known here yet whether the Iron Knight sank or whether there were survivors. Curtin thinks there must have been survivors as the Iron Knight was being convoyed by the Mildura (sloop?).

The Australian guerillas who have been operating in Timor for many months have been withdrawn. There was evidence that the Japanese were heavily reinforcing in an effort to drive the Australians out. It is believed, however, that some of the evacuated troops perished when the sloop Armidale was torpedoed.

The government has information of dissatisfaction in the United States with the trend of post-war organisation in the United Kingdom in relation to trade and similar matters. Sir Stafford Cripps expressed some of the dissatisfaction in certain quarters. There is also dissatisfaction in high places in America with Churchill’s speech recently in which he gave an indication of what was regarded as a ‘stand pat’ attitude on post-war organisation.

Curtin sent out a special call to the roundsmen this afternoon to talk to him. He mentioned the attacks on Fadden particularly in the Daily Telegraph. He was particularly bitter about the Telegraph. He said that Fadden’s stand in favour of the Militia Bill followed reading to War Council last week of the Casablanca cables. These showed quite clearly that there was to be no change in the ‘beat Hitler first’ policy and that Australia must hold on. Curtin said: ‘I defy any man in Australia, whoever he may be, to send men, no matter how equipped they might be, north of the equator. This applies also to naval forces for some considerable time to come.’

Curtin said the attacks on Fadden were unfair. He pointed out that MacArthur’s view was that he had only three or four divisions at the most to start an offensive drive north, and these of course were nothing like sufficient. Curtin commented that the Opposition Executive, which three times had unanimously recommended support for the Bill by the Opposition parties, were Prime Ministers. None of them had any love for him particularly, but as Prime Ministers they knew the problems he was facing.
It was pointed out to Curtin that if all this was true, and that Fadden had taken the stand he did because he knew all about Casablanca and its implications to Australia, the speech he had made to Parliament on the Militia Bill was a sham fight. (Fadden indicated, in effect, that the Opposition would lose no time in altering the Bill when it was able to do so.) Curtin agreed that this was so, but said that it was politics for Fadden to do so.

After hearing Curtin, my comment, disregarding the rights and wrongs of the militia issue, would be that Curtin's case in support of Fadden was weakly grounded in this instance. At the end of the interview Curtin almost admitted that this was so, because after starting off by seeking a favourable press on Fadden, he finished by saying he would leave it to our judgement.

11 February 1943

The American cargo steamer Silver Star (7000 tons) has been torpedoed 160 miles east of Sydney. The vessel was carrying supplies to Noumea. She left Sydney at 1 pm Monday and at 6 am yesterday reported that she had been torpedoed. Latest news is that she is still afloat.

The first echelon under General Kruger of an American army corps has arrived in Australia. The remainder of three divisions will arrive progressively. They include marines. This is an important event and represents a victory for Curtin who has been pressing for three divisions from America for some months. At first he was refused them. Curtin is very reticent about these troops. He won't say anything about them for the time being. Curtin thinks this is sufficient answer to those critics who say the militia issue is having an adverse effect in America.

Later:
The Silver Star sank. There were no casualties.

18 February 1943  Australian 9th Division arrived back from Middle East.

19 February 1943  Defence Act amended to allow conscripted forces to serve in the South-West Pacific Zone, a limited area beyond Australia's shores.
24 February 1943

Curtin gave his first interview today for nearly a week.

Referring to the plane over Sydney on Friday night he said that the radio direction finders had worked very well. They picked up the plane 138 miles out at 6.55 pm. It was at first thought there were two signals, but later it was established there was only one plane. At that stage the plane was not identified. It was flying at 15,000 feet and at that height could not be seen by the naked eye at that time of day. The sirens were sounded to prevent people getting hurt by shrapnel. Nine planes went up to look for the intruder, and five planes were in the air together for hours on end. The planes were one Beaufighter, six Hudsons and two Ansons.

Curtin showed a minute-by-minute report of the progress of the plane from 6.55 pm until it was lost by the direction finders before midnight, but the report of the search and other measures continued until 6.45 am on Saturday.

Curtin was told of rumours in Sydney that the warning was a scare. He expressed disgust. In Parliament today this aspect was raised but was censored. The following is the censored question:

Any suggestion that any person in Australia was responsible for the plane being over Sydney on Friday night was baseless, said the Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, in the House of Representatives. He was replying to Mr Martens (Labor, Qld) who drew his attention to reports of propaganda being spread in Sydney to the effect that the plane was not an enemy but a local machine which had flown over Sydney to assist the Treasurer to fill the loans. He asked the Prime Minister to take steps to ascertain the source of the propaganda.

Mr Chifley’s political reputation is itself an assurance that he would not embark on a stunt of this character,’ declared Mr Curtin. ‘But his political reputation is such that only a base calumniator seeking to affect adversely Australia’s war effort would lend himself to the circulation of such rumours. There are persons in Australia as in every other country who can see no good in their country. The reason is that they are no good themselves.

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Advertisement for war loans
Daily Telegraph (Sydney)
16 February 1942

“No longer can I appeal to you. Let me speak plainly. The enemy is at our very gates and Australia needs your money now if Australia is to endure. In the battle which rages on Australia’s threshold – and in the Loan now opened to support those who are fighting that battle – WE DARE NOT FAIL.”

INVEST IN THE LIBERTY LOAN

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94 During the war the government raised £990 million in 16 loans, variously titled War Loans, Liberty Loans, Victory Loans and the Austerity Loan. Each loan was the subject of a concentrated publicity campaign in which the Prime Minister played the leading role.
The 9th Division has arrived safely in Fremantle. Communication between Western Australia and the eastern States will be cut off for some time to come as the troops (30,000 of them) are still in grave danger. Curtin is very worried. He said he has not slept well for three weeks. He anticipates danger on the eastern coast. The ships carrying the troops are so large that they cannot use the docking facilities available in Adelaide and Melbourne, and therefore they have to come to Sydney. To have disembarked them in Western Australia would have meant that they would have been immobilised as a force for six months, as it would take this time to get them sorted out and transported over the inadequate railway system between Western Australia and the east.

Curtin believes that the Jap plane on Friday night was looking into Sydney and along the coast to see whether these troops had arrived. Therefore Curtin considers that the danger is acute and he is greatly disturbed by the gossiping which is being spread about the fact that these troops are on the way home.


2 March 1943

The last ship of the convoy bringing back 9th Division troops from the Middle East arrived in Sydney Harbour on Sunday.

The government has received from the New Zealand Government details of a riot at a prisoner-of-war camp. Japanese prisoners after adopting a truculent attitude rushed the guards throwing stones and other missiles. The guards fired a volley into the rioters, 48 of whom were killed and 62 injured. One guard died of injuries and others are in hospital. For the time being a ban has been placed on the publication of the story outside New Zealand. The details of the affair will be conveyed to the Japanese Government. It is hoped that the Japanese Government will take a reasonable view of the occurrence in view of the Australian troops in their hands.

The background to MacArthur’s communique on Japanese concentrations in the north is: Reconnaissance
has revealed 250,000 tons of enemy shipping in and near Rabaul. This includes 15 warships and 51 transports. In the Solomons there is evidence that some Japanese units are being withdrawn. In the north-east sector the Japanese Air Force is not using the strength of which it is capable. Curtin showed a map which came from Chinese sources showing Japanese aims in and around Australia. The map was drawn in May last year and events have proved that the Japanese strategy then revealed is being implemented. The map shows the use of the northern islands as bases with protecting screens in the Solomons and in the northern Indian Ocean. Japanese interest in Australia is shown by ringed occupation areas around Darwin and around the southern tip of Western Australia including Perth, Albany and other areas part of the way along the Bight.

The background to MacArthur’s suggestion to Churchill that he should visit the South-West Pacific is: Some weeks ago Curtin made this submission and Evatt’s trip abroad is one phase of Curtin’s reinforcement of the suggestion. MacArthur’s view (and Curtin’s) is that Churchill, who has never seen Australia, and who has no conception of our needs apart from what his strategists tell him, could not fail to be impressed if he saw our difficulties. He would be asked for 1000 planes and a few cruisers. This was behind MacArthur’s statement that a visit by Churchill would be worth more than an army corps. Curtin and MacArthur would prefer planes and ships to an army corps.

5 March 1943 Prime Minister Curtin announces presence of RAF and RAAF Spitfire squadrons in Australia

17 March 1943

Curtin has been reticent on background information for some weeks now. This follows his angry outburst against a certain paper which, after learning what the real position was, wrote editorials which were contrary to fact.

The Japs in their raid on Darwin yesterday hit two oil tanks and damaged others. Curtin is concerned over the Japanese activity which he regards as indicating the withdrawal of Japanese strength from the Solomons for
use against Australia. All our air strength has been taken from West Australia and sent north. Curtin says we could not, with the material available, fight in the north and northwest at the same time.

A specific safeguard for malaria has been discovered and will shortly be manufactured in Australia. It is not an Australian invention and is different from the new repellent recently developed by the CSIR.

Curtin is extremely angry over the disclosure that Kenney has returned to the United States. He said Washington is angry too. The announcement will give the Japs information that Kenney has left this theatre. They will know that the best air commander in this part of the world is no longer here, and they will know that he went back for one purpose—namely, to get more air strength.

23 March 1943

Curtin is disappointed that Churchill should have disposed of the Far East in a few sentences. His statement that Hitler cannot be beaten until 1944 meant that we would get what was left over after Europe had the choice of whatever arms were available.

Curtin said that the war against Hitler was going to involve great shipping losses against the United Nations. The British shipping position was disquieting and Britain’s food position also was not good. All this meant that Japan would keep coming against our perimeter, and to combat it we would need naval protection and air transport. Japan would be a constant menace to our northern coast from their bases in Sumatra and Borneo. The Japs had sufficient material outside our area of reconnaissance. They could come through the Sunda Strait and could crack our new base at Exmouth. They might even make a hit-and-run raid against Fremantle. It would take them a week to come down our west coast, but it would take more than a week for assistance to come to us.

Within the last week Curtin has been in what he terms recommunication with Roosevelt. His point was that the struggle which Australia had to face had all the certainty of a greater time being required to do the job than the European war would take, because by the time we had got
round to a move against the Japs they would have built up their resources. Therefore a war of attrition would place a greater cost on us relatively than on Britain and the United States. We had a problem to replace sick men in New Guinea and Darwin and we were also doing some work in the Arafura Sea and the York Peninsula.

Curtin digressed to refer to 'a certain sharpness of criticism' in the Auditor-General's report regarding waste. The £2 million base to which the Auditor-General referred is the Tocumwal air base. Curtin said: 'When I came in, Tocumwal was a major project for the defence of the major populated parts of Australia. It was only when the Allied Works program got underway and the Coral Sea battle had been fought that the base became of lesser usefulness.'

Curtin regards the Tocumwal base as the premium on last year's insurance. It could not be regarded as waste because if we were driven back it would still be there. He did not think we would be driven back because we must surely get something from the Allies in the light of the holding war they had planned that we should fight. Tocumwal was in the same category as the Pearce base and the Geraldton base. But if the Japs landed north of Carnarvon, planes operating from these bases would spot them, and in any event they would probably starve in this country.

Curtin said that the British Eastern Fleet was not available to us because it was preoccupied in protecting the shipping around the Cape to the Middle East.

He regarded Churchill's speech as a direct intimation to the Australian people that there was a long struggle ahead of them. This struggle would require all their resources, constantly used. Some might regard the speech as an incentive to complacency. He was not a little afraid that in this country a large part of the speech dealing with post-war reconstruction would produce an easy conscience that we were now 'on the eve'. This was not so. Curtin concluded by saying that the shipping position was bad and that there was the limiting factor on the amount of support that could be sent here.

Newspaper sources have suggested that an important move is likely in the Mediterranean. Curtin says that this refers to an attack on Sardinia. Allied troops cannot be spared from North Africa for this project. They must be
brought from England. The reason for Allied interest in Sardinia is to secure air bases to protect Mediterranean shipping which could then be able to hug the North African coast. Sicily would be too tough a nut to crack for the present.

26 March 1943  Soviet Union renews its fisheries agreement with Japan.

30 March 1943

As background to his statement on the loan, in which he mentioned the amount involved in payment of the services, Curtin said that there are now 440,000 men in the Army in Australia, 120,000 men in the RAAF and 30,000 in the Navy.

He has received from Wilson MP95 a copy of a draft Preference Bill prepared by the RSL and termed an ‘Active Service Men’s and Women’s Preference Act’. Curtin said it was the type of Bill he would like to introduce himself, although the provisions needed careful study. It was very different from the Senate’s amendment, which included no machinery to deal with the matter.

Anthony Eden,96 saying that he did not know the Washington atmosphere, asked Sir Owen Dixon last week if his mission had been successful. Curtin did not tell us Dixon’s opinion, but he did say that the Americans ‘would not have a bar’ of the suggested Continental Councils. The Americans were showing greater interest in China as a Pacific power, but Britain seemed to be thinking of nothing but Europe.

Curtin thinks the press reports that Kenney has got part of what he sought are probably right. So far, there have been 144 Spitfires delivered to Australia, of which 10 have been written off. There are 27 on the water, and there has been no interruption of the promised replacements.

Truscott97 lost his life when diving on a Catalina in practising a tactical manoeuvre. He dived down at 400 miles an hour in a Kittyhawk intending to come up past the Catalina’s nose. The Catalina was apparently closer to the water than he thought and he dived into the sea. It was perfect flying weather and the sea was calm.

96 Anthony Eden (1897–1977), United Kingdom Foreign Secretary, 1940–45.
97 Squadron Leader W. ‘Bluey’ Truscott (1916–43), RAAF fighter ace, claiming 19 German aircraft and one Japanese.
The reason for the failure to announce the name of the American officer killed in Saturday’s Brisbane crash had nothing more than personal significance. He was not a high officer. He was on his way south to see his wife who was gravely ill after childbirth. The child had died. The authorities thought that the shock of her husband’s death might kill the wife.

10 April 1943

Curtin said that Kenney had succeeded in getting half the number of planes Australia had asked for and, although this was disappointing, the gain would be considerable. The new planes would be representative of almost every type of American aircraft. Some types would be doubled in numbers. Special photographic planes would be among the consignment. Curtin seemed very pleased with being able to get this particular type of craft, and it appeared that to date not very modern methods of aerial photography had been used in the north.

Curtin said that the RAAF establishment project—an increase from 31 to 45 squadrons—would stand. The additional planes from the United States would not alter RAAF plans. They would mean that only United States air strength here would be built up.

Curtin also revealed that two more American divisions would be coming to Australia.
Asked about the strategical position Mr Curtin said that if he were to attempt a prognosis, he would say he looked forward with more confidence. Of course, he added, he had always been confident. The Coral Sea battle determined the shape of things. Curtin said: 'That was the day of fate. If it had gone the other way we would have been shot.'

Curtin was very scathing about the off-the-record story which the Sun ran about Kenney. He said the papers might as well tell Tojo everything. He was sick of it. He wondered if offices instructed employees to disregard all censorship instructions. He regarded the Sun's offence as a serious breach, and he was disappointed that information which he provided to enable newspaper editorial writers to be well informed should have been disclosed.

Later:
Curtin said that Australia needed 71 squadrons of planes to hold Australia and from that point to launch an offensive. Australia was now in the process of getting these planes.

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98 General Hideki Tojo (1884–1948), Prime Minister of Japan, 1941–44; War Minister, 1940–44.

15 April 1943 MacArthur states that Japan has almost complete control of the western Pacific sea lanes. Japanese planes raid Milne Bay

22 April 1943 Washington announces that one million tons of Allied shipping were sunk in 1942

3 May 1943 21 Japanese bombers and 30 fighters raid Darwin

7 May 1943 MacArthur's South-West Pacific headquarters announces that five Allied vessels have been sunk by Japanese submarines off eastern Australia

12–25 May 1943 Churchill, Roosevelt and the combined Chiefs of Staff meet in Washington

13 May 1943 Campaign in North Africa ends. Axis forces surrender

14 May 1943 Hospital ship Centaur is sunk off Brisbane by a Japanese submarine

17 May 1943 United Nations conference on food and agriculture opens at Hot Springs, Virginia
17 May 1943

(Resuming these bulletins after a long interruption caused by the dispersal of Ministers and the absence of the Prime Minister in Western Australia.)

The Australian hospital ship *Centaur* has been torpedoed off Moreton Bay. The sinking occurred yesterday and, of a personnel of 326, only 55 survivors have so far been accounted for. The loss will be officially announced in a few days, delay being due to the desire of the authorities to inform next of kin of the victims.

The vessel, which was northward bound after landing wounded at southern ports, carried a crew of 68, 38 medical officers, and 220 members of a medical unit including nurses. The 55 survivors include one woman. The ship sank in a few minutes. Some survivors say they saw the submarine. This is the seventh ship to be sunk in the latest Jap offensive on our east coast. We have had no success against the subs.

Allied ship losses in recent months have been:

- **January**: 320,000 tons
- **February**: 330,000 tons
- **March**: 728,000 tons (including losses in the North African battle)
- **April**: 349,000 tons

The total losses in the Pacific and the Far East since Japan entered the war are 1,475,000 tons, representing 430 ships. In the Pacific recent losses have been:

- **4 January**: 16,000 tons
- **2 February**: 12,000 tons
- **9 March**: 40,000 tons
- **19 April**: 79,000 tons
Talking about the Tunisia campaign, Curtin said it was a compromise proposal reached by Churchill and Roosevelt in deference to Russia because Britain was not certain that, in engaging on a second front in Europe this year, United States forces would be ready. Britain did not want to see her forces decimated, which would probably have been the case in the light of certain experiences (probably he means the commando raid on Dieppe).

Tunisia was a very necessary step to relieve the shipping position for the Allied nations. This has now been done but the importance of the operation as an immediate prelude to operations against Europe should not be overemphasised, Curtin says.

Asked whether there had been a cooling-off of the proposal to attack Sardinia, Curtin said that there apparently had been some cooling off, although actually there had been no rigidity in the proposal that we should move against Sardinia and Sicily.

He went on to say that there was always the possibility of Germany seeking a separate agreement with Russia and for that reason it was essential for the Allies to stage some offensive against Germany and keep the Russians in the field. Germany still had the Russian front to watch and might go all out this summer in the hope of settling the Russians but there was the possibility of a separate agreement. Curtin gave no intimation of any information reaching the government to prompt these observations concerning a separate agreement but I left the conference with the view that he obviously had some reason for making them.

Curtin went on to say that neutral opinion is definite that Germany cannot win the war, but apparently Germany hopes, by continuing her U-boat campaign, to keep going against Russia in a summer offensive. It was obvious that the Germans did not intend to defend the Roman Empire.

Slater, Australia's Minister to Moscow, has reached Washington despite Curtin's suggestion that he stay in Cairo and receive medical treatment. Slater has not actually resigned and Curtin is a bit annoyed over his attitude. He said that we don't cut any ice in the general
plan, and apparently Slater found that Russia did not take Australia into any account and he therefore desired to get out.

22 May 1943

Curtin said that one reason for the Hot Springs food conference, about which there is so much secrecy, is the grave food position in the United States. Roosevelt is trying to get other nations to do with less so that the United States can be supplied.

A remarkable development has been that, in spite of recent huge wheat surpluses, the United States is now negotiating with Australia for immediate shipments of wheat to America. Curtin has a confidential report revealing that after 1944 America’s food position will be such that she will have no foodstuffs with which to supply Europe in the event of the war ending. The food organisation in the United States is chaotic. There is little meat, and gangsters and racketeers are working in the food business on a greater scale than in the prohibition days. For the first time for 40 years California has established a special police force to hunt down cattle rustlers. Canada cannot send wheat or other food to America because she is supplying Britain.

Talking about Australia, Curtin said that the beef position will be difficult because the Americans in Australia demand beef because they have not got the mutton habit. There is plenty of mutton. Butter demands can be met, but eggs are always scarce at this time of the year, and dear too. Milk is a problem because of the drying up of the pastures through drought, and because of manpower difficulties. The present position so far as Sydney is concerned has been aggravated by floods. Distribution is also a problem through manpower, petrol and vehicle difficulties.

Discussing the rural position generally, Curtin said that low standards of labour, which the rural industry had put up with for so long, had been the cause of the gradual drift of the rural population to the cities. This migration had started long before the war.
25 May 1943

Curtin is going to Brisbane to see MacArthur. He will leave Canberra on 30 May, returning on 6 June. He will not make any public appearances, but the visit is of great importance.

Curtin said today that the supply of aircraft and ships to this country at present was not sufficient for the nation’s purposes and the holding war against Japan. We could not provide the requisite scale of escort for convoys which was provided in other oceans or the requisite air cover provided elsewhere. As a result our convoys had an incommoding effect on the movement of ships to a greater degree than in any other part of the world. So far as the air was concerned, the obligations of the holding war compelled us to be blasting against the building-up of the concentrations on the outer fringe of islands. As a result there was not enough to carry out the immediate and pressing responsibility of attempting to prevent the building-up of concentrations and at the same time to provide a complete reconnaissance of the Australian coast. ‘Representations have to be made of course,’ said Curtin. ‘But they will, of course, be another “squeal”.’

Curtin criticised an article in yesterday’s Melbourne Herald by Murdoch. He described it as a ‘dirty stinking article’. The article referred among things to the relationship between Churchill, Roosevelt and Curtin. Curtin said these relationships had always been on the highest plane of cordiality and responsibility. Another article by Murdoch, intended for publication today, was censored completely. I read the relevant extracts and they were remarkable. The article set out to show that the Japanese did not intend to sink the Centaur, because they were kind, considerate foes who had treated their prisoners, the Red Cross and everybody else very well indeed.

Curtin said he was going north to discuss with MacArthur the strategical position he had outlined, and also the decisions that had been made in the recent series of talks in Washington. At the same time there would be the periodical assessment of the state of war as it affected us.

Going back to the article, Curtin said he had told Parliament in private and in public that this government accepted the holding war—it had no alternative. It was very unfair to say that half the American Air Force was in the Pacific and not to mention that there were 14 squadrons
of the RAAF in the northern world. The end of the article was a personal attack on himself.

There was some high talk at the meeting of the Press Censorship Advisory Committee yesterday. Bonney got a lot of things off his chest about Murdoch and Fairfax—supported by examples. The talk is said to have cleared the air a bit although Murdoch is irreconcilable and Fairfax thinks the way Murdoch is thinking.

Referring to the Australian Newspaper Proprietors Association attack on Bonney, Curtin said he had the utmost confidence in Bonney and would tell the Press Censorship Committee that. Curtin added that Murdoch was a bastard because as Director of Information he was an entirely different person from Murdoch as a newspaper director and member of the Press Censorship Committee in that he recommended the doing of certain things, some of them most drastic. He was now condemning some of these things.

‘Apparently,’ added Curtin, ‘they were approved as Director because they did not hit his own papers, but now that they do he is squealing. I am collecting many items indicating what a complete change of front has happened in regard to Murdoch. One of these days I will tell him exactly what I think.’ Curtin went on to attack Murdoch for some of the things he had written, and some of the rules he had violated.

However, at the Censorship Committee meeting a few days later, Curtin did not stand up for Bonney, who now is much aggrieved. Bonney came out and attacked Murdoch, saying that the motion of no confidence was carried because Murdoch controlled six votes at the conference. He said he was not going to be dictated to or ordered about by the Murdoch group. Curtin is believed to have taken little part beyond saying that he had confidence in Bonney. The outcome of it all is that Bonney will reconsider his position as Chief Censor, or have a thorough understanding with Curtin.

The Argus informed Bonney that they disassociated themselves from the ANPA motion and Campbell (Age) told the Press Censorship Committee likewise. The West Australian told Curtin a week or so ago that they had no complaints about censorship.

As you probably know by now, the Ormiston, one of the ships torpedoed off the New South Wales coast last week, has reached port and can be repaired.
1 June 1943

Curtin seems to have become suddenly election conscious in view of the Opposition policy announced by Fadden.

He was asked about Menzies' comment on the Brisbane Line and he replied: 'They will be bloody unhappy if I start talking.' He admitted later that W.C. Wentworth, who had a couple of columns in the Daily Telegraph yesterday, was correct in saying that at one stage it was decided to defend only one part of Australia, including the Kembla-Newcastle area which was the only portion that could keep our munitions and our general war effort going. Dispersal might have meant losing that area and our ability to fight on.

Curtin is a bit surprised that he has not heard about or from Slater, who is now in Washington (presumably undergoing treatment for whatever he contracted in Russia), but he will give no hint about a successor. He is frightened about the kite about Evatt going there or to Washington.

He went on to say that he was pleased at what had happened in the last fortnight. Things that had happened in the last three months since Kenney and Sutherland went had changed the attitude of the high command towards Australia. But while their attitude had changed, there was now the physical problem of giving this theatre equality in strength. His own view was that for the first time we had a global strategy. Global strategy was no longer a European battle, but that did not alter the fact that the problem of Europe had hardened. It would be a formidable task to get into Europe. The unwisdom had been proved of allowing the Japs to consolidate and build up and take away resources of rubber and petrol and other vital war materials, which would take God knows how long after Europe to secure.

'It is going to make horrible demands—and so will Europe,' he added. 'The great thing will be for the Russians to hang on until we can get the requisite power to push up somewhere on another European front. We have not got a front in Europe—except that which the Russians are now holding. For the first time it is possible to see daylight in the ultimate result—if our own mistakes do not beat us, and I do not think too many will be made.'
He then switched to the local area and commented on the reconnaissances over the Dutch East Indies, despite the bad weather. He said we could not get ships to move our men against these islands.

Switching back to political matters, Curtin said he thought Sir Keith Murdoch was very disappointed that he could not find a leader—‘even from our camp. He had hopes of me for a while, and then Evatt—but Evatt had two trips to the United States and was not accessible.’

Curtin revealed that the Commonwealth’s lawyers were in trouble again as the waterside workers were not ‘protected’. They had no ‘employer’—and the companies were as anxious as the wharfies to prevent their system from coming into operation. The regulation would have to be amended and in the meantime he would say nothing.

Finishing up the interview on defence, Curtin said that the day which had saved Australia had been the day of the Coral Sea battle in which our fate (and he had known it) had hung in the balance, and which had made the Japs doubtful of their forces in all subsequent attacks.

7 June 1943  Butter rationing is introduced at the rate of half a pound per week

9 June 1943

Curtin revealed that important operational and strategical operations were pending. Without going into too great detail he said that limited offensives would be undertaken as soon as possible which would have the effect of making Japanese-held positions on the southern fringe of the defensive areas, which she is building on the north, vulnerable when Germany is defeated.

Curtin is rather bitter over Ward and Fadden, but Ward in particular over the Brisbane Line. When telling us that...
Fadden had written asking for the production of certain papers at the War Council meeting in Sydney, he said again that if he opened his mouth somebody would get hurt. He said the Opposition had access to many papers which he did not have as Leader of the Opposition, but it was a difficult matter to prove that all the documents in hand were interpreted to them at the time. The fact remained that he inherited all these things. It was also perfectly true that he had the highest military reasons and advice for insisting on the recall of the divisions from overseas in view of the military situation here. He did not mind being made the scapegoat for the country as he had been for the Labor Party, a fact which some people, even his own supporters, did not recognise. Anyhow he had resources left to him for giving some people a shock.
He went on to say that principles and tradition were all very well but at the time Darwin and Moresby could not have been defended. He was quite prepared at one time to import 20,000 Tamils for labouring work and to rebuild the Darwin and Moresby jetties despite the White Australia policy of Labor. Those traditions were all very well but they had to be sacrificed at some time and he would not hang on to them if the safety of the country was at stake.

Going back to the Brisbane Line, Curtin said it was significant that the Opposition had not demanded publicity for the Greek campaign and the documents relating thereto.

Curtin confirmed the Nazi radio story that Churchill was in Russia. It is clear that the Germans had attacked the airliner on which Leslie Howard was killed in the belief that Churchill was on it.

After his interview with MacArthur in Sydney, Curtin said there were two things outstanding—Allied naval forces at present in the South-West and South Pacific are 20 per cent greater than the entire Japanese naval strength, and early moves are certain.

He said that Slater, the Australian Minister to Moscow, was now on his way back to Australia, having left Los Angeles by steamer. He should be here about the middle of the month. There is something curious about the Slater business, because when he reached Washington he was supposed to be remaining in Cairo for medical treatment. There has been little word from him in Washington and apparently messages to him were not replied to.

Evatt is about to leave the United States for London.

Later:

Referring again to Pacific strategy, Curtin said that certain decisions had been reached and that we were now entering the second phase of the war in the South and South-West Pacific.

I have a clearer picture now of the whole situation but I have still to come to certain decisions. It has been proved that the holding war imposed upon us in circumstances of great difficulty is an obligation under the local strategy which has been discharged, but we are now able to contemplate a second phase which involves certain limited offensive action. We have established that the enemy cannot occupy this country or any appreciable part of it. We can definitely hold it as a base for future action. It can now be used with the strength that has...
been brought here for the second phase. I can say no more about limited offensives but you can sit tight.

Asked whether these plans involved unity of command of the two areas, Curtin continued:

The formulation of certain projects has been completed for the institution of what might be described as limited offensives. For the purposes of these offensives or projects there has been established what is in practice unity of command as between the forces of the South and South-West Pacific and these involve the use of all resources that have been allocated in each theatre. That is to say, the unity of command between New Zealand and ourselves in this area, although not formally changed, is in fact resolved but the forces involved may for subsequent projects be withdrawn. There is nothing permanent about the arrangement. Events will decide.

Curtin added that the second phase was going to be fairly long because we were not going to make a bloody business of it. In these matters we had in mind the idea of detaining the enemy in certain places or perhaps immobilising them, shutting them off and battering them from the air rather than throwing masses of infantry against them. The struggle in the Pacific was going to be a long one. It was not a sprint in which we exhausted ourselves over a short distance.

From the point of view of Australia I feel that the pressure on our country, which has so long been continued, is now about to be thrown back and cannot be maintained by the enemy. That involves us putting pressure on them, so that if the war continues for any length of time, or when we are ready for major offensives, we shall be in a good position for them. That will, however, involve further sacrifices on the part of the country. I feel sure that by the end of the year, provided these things go as planned, the extent of the sacrifices demanded by the people may be lessened—the punishment which war is imposing upon the community should be diminished. That will be contingent upon events in other quarters as well as our own. If we should lose a great number of planes in Europe, for instance, it would affect us in this area.

Curtin was asked if the limited offensives he had mentioned would be major in character and his reply was 'Yes, but there is a limit.' He added:

The submissions which have marked the last three months have been of great importance to Australia and the Pacific. At the same time we have to bear in mind that we are feeling now the effects of attrition. We have not the “fat” we had when we
started. In every sense I inherited a country which was in dire peril but the position has improved considerably and I think I am entitled to say that we are not living in a fool’s paradise any longer.

I am able to say that the naval strength of the Allied nations now in the South and South-West Pacific is, we believe, 20 per cent stronger than the total naval strength of the Japanese. We would be willing to engage in a naval engagement but we don’t think the enemy would risk it. All the same we are not willing to undertake a major naval engagement until we have made certain that the bases from which aircraft can be dispatched are in a position to cover our forces and at the same time cover the enemy. We are willing to risk it but that would depend largely on where the enemy came from. We are hoping that when we are actually through the second phase it will not be just merely a matter of where the enemy is. For that reason we do not think they will offer their fleet.

Referring to the Jap Navy, Curtin said:

We think that as they have lost their audacious, militant and aggressive commander they will be more cautious than hitherto, because their second man is merely a Chief of Staff and a more cautious type. I feel that we have been in a defensive posture until now, and that now the Japs have lost the initiative and are in a defensive posture. The strength which the Allied nations put into North Africa was out of all proportion to the task imposed upon them, the strength allocated to this theatre was also out of all proportion to the task imposed upon us, but in the reverse direction. I am not complaining about the strength put into North Africa; that is the secret of success in war but we have had to carry on with an Air Force that should have been stronger having regard to all the circumstances of the task assigned to us, and at times it was touch and go.

14 June 1943

Curtin said that the Japanese Ambassador to Russia, Sato, has gone to Moscow from Kuibyshev. Everybody was wondering what was in the wind. Curtin, in discussing the European position, said it would be quite feasible for Russia and Germany to come to terms. It was also feasible, although he admitted he had nothing to back up the opinion, that the United States might pull out of Europe if the war there took too long and say that they had been allotted the Pacific and they would concentrate

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102 Naotake Sato (1882-1971), a career diplomat, Japanese Ambassador to Russia during World War II.
on it. He went on to say that the Presidential elections were coming along and the President must have victories.

There is a good chance of Mrs Roosevelt coming to Australia but the government does not want to say too much about it.

Curtin is incensed over the criticism by Fadden and Hughes of his 'no invasion' story. He says that the entire position has altered as a result of the Washington conference. To ease our manpower position MacArthur is getting, in addition to the men who will already come here, 3000 men for ground work for the Air Force. We will also get such a satisfactory flow of planes under the new set-up that by the end of this year we will have no less than 4000 operational planes quite apart from reserves and trainers and such like. Curtin reiterated that the naval position in the Pacific was good. He is angry with the war correspondents in Brisbane and he related some of the messages which some had tried to get out, the Britishers being the worst. He is also incensed over the broadcast by the ABC on the night of his statement. He immediately contacted the ABC on the subject.

Sir Ernest Fisk\[^{103}\] will be going abroad in three or four weeks to complete discussions commenced by Sir Campbell Stuart on the Cable and Wireless Agreement to facilitate transmissions to the United States and Canada. The new agreement provides for charges on the basis of 100 words instead of so much per word. The installations involved in the new proposals provide for the erection of relay stations at Invercargill, Perth, Colombo, Barbados and other places.
The Beaufighter program will be completed by the end of 1944 and we are now considering a new type of plane to put into production. That is why the Lancaster is here. The British Government would like us to produce the Lancaster. Plans depend on the judgement of those concerned whether the war would be long or short. If there was a possibility of the war ending in a reasonable time, Curtin said attention would have to be paid to the question of producing a type of war plane, the machinery and dies for which could without much trouble be turned to the production of civil aircraft.

18 June 1943  Prime Minister Curtin announces that Australia is no longer in danger of invasion

18 June 1943

When the air aid which Australia has been promised comes to hand, the RAAF will have 72 squadrons. These planes will be Australia's property and will remain with Australia after the war. Curtin expects to have them within a 'satisfactory' time, dependent of course on whether there's a big blow-up somewhere which will necessitate their diversion. All the planes will come from America.

The armoured division is now in Western Australia in its entirety. It was sent there because of its mobility and the comparative flatness of the State. Early in the war it was proposed that a road be built connecting the northwest with the more habitated parts of Western Australia. At that time the military authorities considered that with our lack of strength it might prove a boon to the enemy. Now, however, the road is being built. It will be not so much a road as a trafficable artery, as the natural advantages of the terrain are being taken advantage of and the engineers are merely filling in the soft spots.

Curtin does not think universal training will be continued after the war. The military authorities oppose universal training because the training is too incomplete and sketchy. Curtin thinks instead we will have a comparatively large standing army. This would necessitate the development of more training establishments.

29 June 1943  United States forces land in Nassau Bay, New Guinea
5 July 1943

A n interesting position is arising with Portugal. Because of the strategic importance of the Azores in the U-boat war, discussions are proceeding with Portugal for the use of the Azores by the Allies for the building of airfields and other facilities to enable the war against the U-boats to be carried on. Development of such a base would mean that U-boats would be subject to attack from almost every part of the Atlantic. The discussions have not yet reached an announceable stage.

The discussions have raised an interesting question relating to the colonial possessions of various powers including Portugal, France and the Netherlands, and this is where Australia comes in. Curtin has not had time to discuss the question with the Opposition in view of the expedition necessary in the matter but he has communicated to the British Government the strong views of his government.

The Australian Government has taken the view that the question of sovereignty of the colonial possessions of a number of nations is affected by the discussions. Australia was quite ready to recognise the sovereignty of the possessing powers over the islands to the north of Australia, but Australia also sought arrangements to ensure the security of these islands in the post-war planning so that the security of Australia itself could be guarded. Australia wants it to be arranged that these islands cannot be used by an enemy in the future as stepping stones for another advance against this country. To this end she wants it laid down that the possessing nations should observe the principle that their islands must be so used that they cannot become a foothold for a future aggressor.

Therefore, the Australian view is that Portugal, while allowing the Allies to use the Azores, should not lose her sovereignty over the islands. In the same way Australia was willing to entrust the security of the islands to the north of this continent to an arrangement in which Britain and the United States would be controlling parties. Curtin had this in mind when he mentioned, in a speech some time ago, that Britain, Australia and America should become the policemen of the Pacific.

Australia's views in the present discussions largely concern Timor, but New Caledonia and other islands
would be concerned in later discussion. Curtin's view is that the possessing powers haven't the means adequately to defend these islands, and that after the war this position should be corrected by Britain and America assisting in their defence and so ensuring that Japan, if Japan should again go to war, would not occupy the northern islands in the walkover which marked her present southward drive. Curtin says that President Salazar of Portugal, who has been very difficult in the past, is a 'bit more sensible'.

Questioned about our own islands which we have not found it possible to defend—such as New Guinea—Curtin says he quite agrees that while we should retain sovereignty, America could assist militarily in the post-war Pacific set-up.

10 July 1943 Allied forces invade Sicily

14 July 1943

At a press conference in Melbourne Curtin referred to the offensive now in progress in the north. He said he felt certain that by the end of this month the offensive would be in reasonable shape. He would not be leaving the eastern States for election purposes before the end of the month. In that period there was going to be a big intake of equipment.

He said War Councillors were surprised at what he had shown them. 'It will not be too bad—the Japs are reinforcing as they must, but they cannot do it properly. We can match them plane for plane, gun for gun. They will do some damage, they will try diversions; there will be raids and they will also bring task forces down. All that is being met, but I cannot ignore it at present. We are getting into the third quarter and they are thinking of using the 19th man. I have been looking at our side and it may pay to put our 19th man in now.'

 Asked about the Darwin raids he said he had a very strong Liberator bombing squadron at Fenton and the Japs were anxious to knock it about. We also had other strong squadrons in the locality which they were trying to pepper. MacArthur has left Milne Bay and is moving about. He has not returned to the mainland. Everything was going increasingly north.

104 Dr Antonio Salazar (1889-1970), President of Portugal Council of Ministers, 1932-68.
The Rocklea factory near Brisbane which has been making munitions has been turned over completely to plane servicing. It employs about 2000 and Curtin cited it as an example of redirection of industrial capacity to meet altered needs. Elections would not alter the program.

He said that Dr Evatt was going to complete his mission and in fact had been given another task that would keep him a few days longer. Bruce was in touch with the whole business and might be able to take it up. When asked if Bruce would be recalled at the end of his term, he replied, ‘Not as far as I am concerned’.

Sir Ernest Fisk is going to England. Curtin said he himself had done a lot to lay foundations for a type of communication far superior to any Australia previously had. We had not yet succeeded in getting it.

On the question of parliamentary privilege Curtin does not think that a resolution of the House would meet the position. He thinks an Act would be required, affecting the relationship of the Bill of Rights to Parliament. He thinks that Parliament should prescribe its own privileges and set out its own standing orders, but is a bit fearful of the dangers of a start to curtail privileges. He remarked on the Ward business that he had not been surprised at the result—the Opposition had asked for a Royal Commission hoping it would be refused.

Going back to the war in the north, he said the comparative heaviness of the Jap attacks was due to the monsoonal period in Burma which released forces for the south. The Japs now had the choice of concentrating on Darwin, and letting their other drive go, or ceasing their pressure on us and possibly going out of the Solomons and New Guinea. It was a slow business because when we got somewhere we had to stop and consolidate. The idea was to drive the Japs from bases from which planes could be used against our naval forces and also to relieve the submarine pressure. The sub position was not bad but there might be one off the coast for nuisance purposes.

Blamey is ill in Melbourne with a bad throat but is anxious to get back to New Guinea next week.

16 July 1943 Roosevelt and Churchill urge the Italian people to surrender
19 July 1943

Curtin has had a cable from Churchill saying that he is worried over the references to British policy and the use of British policy as an issue in the Australian elections. Curtin said he was now considering a reply. Asked what Churchill might have been referring to, Curtin looking at the Melbourne Herald representative said: ‘You must have heard references to the Burma Road.’ Curtin recalled that Churchill said nothing last federal elections when Menzies’ and Churchill’s pictures were shown together.
Curtin also took the Melbourne Herald rep to task over an advertisement in Saturday night’s Sporting Globe. The advertisement showed a workman being directed to a munitions factory at Berriwillock despite his protest that he was already engaged in war work. The advertisement counselled action by electors to prevent such regulation and advised a vote for United Australia Party candidates. Firstly, Curtin said if there was a munitions factory at Berriwillock the newspaper had infringed national security by disclosing it; secondly, if there was not such a factory, the advertisement published a lie. He went on to refer to the responsibility of newspapers and said that a time was coming when newspapers must take the responsibility for statements appearing in them.

Curtin has agreed to HMAS Australia and HMAS Hobart being sent to join the American fleet in the Solomons.

A proposal by the Victorian Labor Party to use pictures of Curtin and MacArthur in an election leaflet has been countermanded by Curtin. He said he saw no reason why MacArthur should be drawn into a political disputation in this country.

Curtin intends to make a statement in Sydney on the strike at Duly and Hansford’s Sydney works. He described the trouble there as ‘one of the dirtiest bits of work’.

In a discussion on election prospects, Curtin was asked for his view. He summed it up as follows:

Opposition hopes
Brisbane
Ballarat
Corio
Wannon
Riverina
Maranoa
Fremantle

Government hopes
Denison
Darwin
Forrest
Grey
Adelaide
Robertson
Hume

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165 Duly and Hansford’s factory at Marrickville, Sydney, was one of the main manufacturers of shell fuses.
21 July 1943

Curtin received a brief message from the naval authorities today announcing that the Australian cruiser *Hobart* had been torpedoed by a Jap submarine off the Solomons. Two destroyers are standing by. He has no further information at present.

25 July 1943  Mussolini resigns and is arrested
26 July 1943  Italy is placed under martial law

26 July 1943

Curtin said that while he had no official background on Mussolini, his opinion was that Mussolini's resignation had been secured in order to obtain better peace terms from the Allied nations. On the other hand the move might be aimed at consolidating Italian patriotism for a fight for their country rather than for Fascism, but Curtin said he believed the Italians had no stomach for the fight.

The next step for the Allies would be a move against Yugoslavia. British air power was now picking on the German arteries—the sources of their supply.

Curtin said he had written letters to Opposition members of the Advisory War Council conveying to them requests by Churchill that his name should not be used in connection with the Australian elections. Curtin reiterated that he had received cables from Churchill objecting to the manner in which Opposition members were using his name and speeches for their election campaign. Churchill was very 'snaky' about it, Curtin said.

1 August 1943  Germans disarm Italian forces in Crete
14–24 August 1943  Churchill, Roosevelt and the combined Chiefs of Staff attend first Quebec conference
16 August 1943  State of siege is declared in Norway
21 August 1943  Australian Labor Party wins federal election with large majority; John Curtin is re-elected Prime Minister
3 September 1943  Allied forces invade Italy
6 September 1943

Curtin says Bruce's post in London will be one of the first matters to be discussed by the new Cabinet. There is little doubt that Bruce will be reappointed as Curtin said that Bruce had been a marvellous man in the job and Australia had been well served by him. He had kept Australia informed of many matters of moment concerning which no official advices had been received until later, with the result that the government had been able to have its decisions ready for official communications.

Curtin was asked tonight about his intentions regarding a trip abroad. He said that operations are proceeding in this theatre and operations which have to reach a more decisive stage make it impossible at present to reassess Australia's problems. Curtin said he had to be sure that the Japanese would not attempt a diversion against the west coast or Darwin. He did not believe they could do that, but it could not be pushed aside as being out of the question.

Furthermore important supply and other missions from the United States and Great Britain were here or coming and the measure and physical capacity of Australia to supply increased American forces, with the obligation to maintain supplies to Great Britain, must also be gone into.

There were no immediate problems which called for his presence as Prime Minister abroad. The decisions of the Casablanca and Quebec conferences envisaged certain strategy which had to be developed. The basic strategy was the defeat of Germany first. Evatt had imparted Australia's views abroad and had brought back the views of other leaders. Summed up, military developments had to reach a more definite stage before any phase calling for more definite consultations would arise. A visit abroad by himself at present would have no more purpose than goodwill. There were more important problems still at home. Curtin said he could not see any possibility of his leaving Australia before the early part of 1944.

Curtin said it was intended to build up the External Affairs Department. It would be necessary to appoint men to go into the islands after the Japanese had been driven out to watch Australia's economic and commercial
interests. This was where a friendly press would help because some of the men appointed would have no apparent diplomatic claims but would be really 'economic bandits' who would fight the go-getting American commercial interests on Australia's behalf. There was evidence that the Americans would not give up economic claims to some of the Pacific islands. Australia must be prepared to watch her own interests very carefully.

7 September 1943

Talking about his proposed Empire Council, Curtin said:

British prestige suffered a bad knock in the Far East. I not only regret that but I want to retrieve it. In addition, the great demand for supplies in the war before America entered gave an immense impetus to American and Canadian industry. It gave an immense impetus to the American economic structure which must carry it forward with giant strides.

The coming of Japan into the war and our own position made it more or less inevitable that America should rediscover the Pacific Ocean, its resources and potentialities, also the Far East.

The problems of India and China economically are problems which, I think, are going to evoke an increased economic development in those places. Chinese and Indian political development must cause a corresponding economic expansion. An instance of this is the transplanting of tremendous British industries, particularly textiles, to India.

Again, British shipbuilding will suffer a blow after the war because of the development of this industry in the United States. I can see these two industries—shipbuilding and textiles—encountering very severe competition after the war.

The British Commonwealth of Nations has got to have economic strength as well as the unity which the throne symbolises. We have got to keep in mind all the time the sovereign symbol with autonomous rights. What I have in mind is the development of common ideas so that these sovereignties will understandingly promote joint welfare without sacrificing their own interests and position. I want to develop a practical fraternity among constituted members of the Empire for dealing with the world at large and with themselves. Perhaps that sounds a loose sort of show, but the fact is that the ties which unite the British Commonwealth are of that nature and are no less weak because that is the case.
Curtin went on to say that there were times when it was inevitable that one or other members of the Commonwealth should say things which appeared to be selfish, but if we had this full understanding it would not be so considered and would not evoke that immediate misunderstanding which left a certain amount of unpleasant criticism because it was unjustified.

There was another problem facing the world. Millions would die before the end of the war through lack of food. He thought our own prisoners of war in Japanese hands were being badly treated and the basic reason was the food question as well as the unconcern of the Japs.

The development of Australia in its search after the war for a population requisite to its safety could best be done in concert with the other members of the British Commonwealth and with their realisation that we were doing what was for the general good.

Curtin then turned to the White Australia policy. He said this was not a racial theory. In 1924 at Geneva he had handed to the Japanese representative a memorandum which he himself prepared giving the history of the White Australia policy. Implementation of such a policy did not occur in any Australian Act. The only Act which dealt with immigration was the *Immigration Restriction Act*. He explained the trouble that had occurred through ill-treatment of Kanakas brought to Queensland for the sugar industry and the protests made by the British Government against such treatment. Dr Soong, the Chinese Foreign Minister, fully appreciated Australia's views on this matter, but not so Dr Hsu Mu, Chinese Minister in Australia, whom Curtin could have recalled if he wished.

8 September 1943  Italy surrenders to the Allies
11 September 1943  Australian forces enter Salamaua, New Guinea
16 September 1943  Australian 7th and 9th Divisions enter Lae
2 October 1943  Australian troops capture Finschhafen, New Guinea
13 October 1943  Italy declares war on Germany
14 October 1943

Curtin has received a request from the British Government that comment in Australian newspapers suggesting that the end of the monsoon season in Burma would see the beginnings of an offensive in the Southeast Asia area, should be discontinued. Curtin handed on the request to press representatives. The British Government stated that an effort should be made to avoid focusing attention on the Southeast Asia area. The published comment had had the effect of creating excitement and causing Japanese reinforcement of the area. The British Government had already taken action with regard to the United Kingdom and Indian newspapers.

26 October 1943

The new Australian representatives abroad will be announced shortly. They are: India: General Iven Mackay, New Zealand: Mr D’Alton, Tasmanian Minister for Agriculture; Moscow: Mr J. J. Maloney, President of the Sydney Trades and Labour Council. Curtin has approved the Indian and Russian appointments, but Stalin has not yet given his OK.

Curtin is pleased at the trend of the Moscow talks, on which he has been fully informed. He said that apparently all aspects of the Moscow conference were going along satisfactorily, with the exception of the Balkans situation. I gather that the question of post-war frontiers in this area has been giving trouble.

Curtin gave the tip that while all eyes are on Italy, which is in the news, we should look elsewhere for possible openings. He did not elaborate further except to say that we were hoping for air bases from which to operate against the Rumanian airfields, Germany’s last source of supply. He said Turkey could not be relied upon. She had been wooed by both Germany and the Allies and at present had made deposits available to Germany in return for the completion of certain contracts which included equipment.

Curtin is due almost any day for a conference with MacArthur who might have to go north very quickly. Blamey left yesterday for three weeks in the north where softening up has been in progress for the assault on Rabaul.

1 November 1943 United States forces land on Bougainville
2 November 1943

Curtin promised today to release, off the record, the decisions of the Moscow conference. He will do this in a day or two. He commented: 'I am more interested in the development of operations against Rabaul and getting it clear. All these other things (indicating the Moscow report) are merely facades. They remind me of one of my unity conferences.'

 Asked about a military successor to Sir Iven Mackay, Curtin said the government was not going to make any decision or announcement on this until after the 'Rabaul show'. The army was now being reorganised and there would be a number of changes in the commands. For instance, officers in New Guinea would have to be replaced as they were due for a spell. The armoured division was being redisposed, and part would become a motorised corps.

 Answering criticism by Messrs Spender, Hughes and McEwen that he had failed to honour his promise that the militia would take a fair share of the fighting, Curtin said that the 9th Division had been out of the fighting for a long while. The whole of the forces had been assigned to the Commander-in-Chief and he had never interfered. He had never said how forces should be used or what forces should be employed.

 Curtin added: 'I have no doubt in regard to land forces that MacArthur acts on the advice of Blamey and other commanders. The use of forces depends on many things such as their training, where based and their target.'

 The story on the proposed trade missions, written today, came from a background talk by Curtin. He referred to the missions as 'commercial bandits' who were going to see that the 'bandits' of other nations did not deprive Australia of her trade.

3 November 1943

Recent visits by overseas shipping officials and the consequent discussions and observations in Australia are already beginning to produce results. Three Liberty ships are now loading in the United States with various cargoes including 9 million feet of timber, cement and other commodities needed here. Mr Curtin said that
After discharging these cargoes here the ships will be allotted to ‘this jurisdiction’, which apparently means they will become part of the Australian merchant marine. He emphasised the value of another three ships of this size, and indicated more would follow. This, he says, is the first indication of an improvement in the shipping situation. The timber is needed for shipbuilding, but the bulk of the other cargoes will go direct to operational areas.

There is no indication of Curtin’s movements next week except that he said it would be very unlikely that he could receive a deputation from the Australian Council of Trade Unions in Canberra next Wednesday. He is still awaiting news, apparently from MacArthur, on the proposed visit to Brisbane.

3 November 1943

The following is a transcript of an off-the-record talk to correspondents in Moscow by Mr Anthony Eden. It was cabled out to Mr Curtin.

While the four-power declaration is a useful expression of contemporary sentiments, we, and we think the Russians, attach greater importance to the establishment of the Council to deal with matters relating to Italy and the London Commission. The latter if it succeeds would give us international machinery for joint study of an important class of common European problems of which we have so long been in need. Although it is desirable to give a good welcome to the four-power declaration, to which the Americans attach importance, these expressions of good intentions cannot in themselves carry us far. The Russians are interested in doing things. This should also be our own objective, for it is upon the practical results of the conference that we hope to concentrate.

As regards the limitation of the membership of the London Commission it should be remembered that the three governments are setting up the Commission as a means of clearing their own minds on certain problems. Its function is to advise them on these problems, and it is in no sense designed as a means of dictating to other United Nations members or taking final decisions without reference to them. The three governments may well seek the advice of the other governments in the course of their own considerations.

As regards Poland, this is one subject on which we have made no progress, but in the changed atmosphere prospects may improve.
11 November 1943

Curtin privately described Evatt's statement on the Moscow conference as 'somewhat effusive'. He thought that President Roosevelt had been a bit premature in describing the conference as 'marvellous'. Evatt also privately agrees that there has been some rather fulsome talk about the conference. He puts forward the novel theory that the conference was engineered by Roosevelt who wanted to break down the anti-Russian prejudice in America and also he wanted to come in on European discussions with Russia without the Republicans describing him as pro-Russian.

The meeting of the War Council to be held in Melbourne next Thursday was arranged there because Menzies could not leave Melbourne. There are no details yet of Curtin's later movements. He will probably leave Canberra on Tuesday, as he has appointments and functions with the visiting Canadian press delegation due in Canberra at the weekend.

War Cabinet spent yesterday afternoon mapping out a five-year aircraft production program. Air Vice-Marshal Jones and Mr McVey were present. The meeting of the War Council is to enable Opposition members to be informed of the government's proposals. Curtin said that the program would be very costly. It was not concerned with the building of civil types of planes, but it would provide the capacity which would enable such planes to be built when the need arose.

Curtin was angry about the publication of the proposal to bring the Duke of Gloucester here as Governor-General. He said the information had been obtained in a sneaky fashion from somebody who had expected to get something from a section of the press, and he probably would. He indicated that he knew the informant and said that he had nothing to do with the making of any decision. Curtin said that nothing official had been done in the matter. For the past nine or ten weeks unofficial exploration had been going on in the matter, but no approach had been made to either the King or the Duke. He declined to say anything for publication. The King, he said, would be shocked at the report. Already he (Curtin) had been swamped with remonstrances. He thought that if an approach was made the King would approve and the Duke would agree to go. He was concerned about the danger of getting the Duke here.
15 November 1943

Curtin revealed today that Britain and Russia have decided to ask Turkey to join in the war by the end of the year. The United States representative was not in a position to join in the decision and he has cabled his government for instructions. The British Government has asked that there be no speculation on Turkey's possible entry into the war.

Curtin thinks that Turkey would be well advised to come in because whatever fears she might have regarding Russia could be put aside through the conditions she would be in a position to impose.

A representative of a Sydney paper put to Curtin a complaint by his office about the continued over-optimism of the communiques from New Guinea. He said that there had been 135 Jap raids on Finschhafen since the Allies took over but he had not been told about them. Curtin said he had discussed the tone of the communiques several times with the Headquarters authorities and he would do so again. He gave no indication that he disagreed with the communiques. He thought that our claims of Japanese losses might often be over-optimistic but he thought there might be a reason for that.

Rumours that the 9th Division had suffered very heavily in New Guinea were put to Curtin. He said that while the 9th had suffered casualties they were not heavy.

17 November 1943  Australian 9th Division begins assault on Sattelberg, New Guinea

17 November 1943

Dealing with the future of the South-West Pacific, Curtin intimated that the trend of things showed that, despite the government's objections, the role which Australia would play was that of the 'hewer of wood and carrier of water'. By this he meant that we were to concentrate on the food supply position and leave the fighting to others.

This comment arose from the question of what was to happen to the militia forces after Rabaul, and whether the
government would attempt to alter the Defence Act to enable the militia forces to be used more extensively. Curtin replied that he was not worrying about that at the moment although the position would not rest where it was.

On the aircraft position, Curtin said that the government's program included the building of Lancasters. It would cost about £2.6 million just to tool up and it would take 2 ½ years to reach this stage. The program did not include the manufacture of engines for the Lancaster. These would be imported from England, but at the next meeting of the War Council and War Cabinet he proposed to submit a proposal that we should go ahead with plans for Lancaster engine manufacture.

Although it would be 2 ½ years before tooling up was completed, the first machine would then be 'off the slips' inside three weeks and deliveries would then be speeded up. He did not indicate what deliveries would be, but another quarter stated that three Lancasters a week would be produced or possibly five a fortnight as a minimum.

Some changes in the Information Department are pending as Bonney settles down. Lionel Wigmore is being moved to Canberra to become editor, while C.C. Dawson, now editor, will become Australasian editor. There is still talk that he might take charge of the Department's London office. Bonney has not a very high opinion of his predecessor, Hawes, who will remain in the Department, but he thinks that McCauley, Assistant Secretary of the Department, is a sound man. Other pending moves concern appointments of Information Department representatives, probably with the title of press attaches, to some of our diplomatic offices overseas.

22 November 1943 Churchill, Roosevelt and Chiang Kai-shek meet at Cairo conference

25 November 1943

War Cabinet yesterday decided to manufacture spare parts for Merlin engines. This will be a preliminary to the manufacture of the complete engine. This is a new departure, as other engines of comparable power which
have been made in Australia have been radial engines.
The Merlin is an engine with cylinders in line.

Curtin is anxious that Australian papers should avoid raising the White Australia issue or even referring to the term ‘White Australia’ at the present juncture. He is concerned about the effect on the coloured people, particularly the Chinese, who are on our side in the war. He points out that there is no legal term ‘White Australia’, which is a term arising out of a policy legally set out in the ‘Alien’ Immigration Restriction Act. Curtin’s comment was inspired by an article set out in the Sydney Daily Mirror protesting against any attempt to interfere with the White Australia policy. The article followed a statement by the Assistant Research Officer of the Post-war Reconstruction Department suggesting that Australia might have to adjust her migration policy in relation to aliens. Curtin did not indicate whether he had chided Ross\textsuperscript{118} on this statement. He said he does not want the Japanese to be given propaganda material for use in China. He also does not want the White Australia issue raised in public or newspaper discussions on the deliberations of various committees and subcommittees which will be preparing recommendations for some time to come on Australia’s post-war migration policy.

Dr Hsu Mu, the Chinese Minister, has raised the White Australia question with Curtin in the past and on previous occasions Curtin has indicated that he has had a number of difficulties with Hsu Mu.

A spokesman,\textsuperscript{119} who is close enough to Curtin to make his views something of a reflection of Curtin’s viewpoint, told me today that Australia would be in difficulties after the war when she tried to make use of the manufacturing potential built up during the war by seeking trade with Asiatics and other coloured people and at the same time strenuously refusing them access to an empty Australia. From a departmental source I learn that the migration committees and subcommittees will have to face the coloured alien migration problem, and for this reason most of their investigation will be secret.

Curtin made a brief statement for publication today on the White Australia issue, but he issued instructions that it should be censored for broadcasting and transmission overseas.

\textsuperscript{118} Lloyd Ross (1901–78), secretary of the NSW Branch, Australian Railways Union, 1938–43; Director of Public Relations, Commonwealth Post-war Reconstruction Department, 1943–49; friend and biographer of John Curtin.

\textsuperscript{119} Probably Don Rodgers, Curtin’s press secretary.
25 November 1943

In an off-the-record talk, the Commonwealth Food Controller, Mr J.F. Murphy, today explained details of the food control system. The talk was a preliminary to the campaign commencing early in December in which the government will seek to educate the public on the reasons for rationing food, particularly meat. This season there has been a record production of all primary products with the exception of dairy products. Milk production, for instance, is 200 million gallons down on last season.

Mr Murphy considers there is a lot of misapprehension about meat. Before the war we produced less than one million tons of meat, of which the Australian people consumed about 740,000 tons, and the remainder went abroad, mainly to Great Britain. The present objective was to add at least 100,000 tons to our production. Rationing would save about 200,000 tons. Our commitments to the British Army alone were nearly 200,000 tons.

On their recent visit to Queensland, he and the Minister for Commerce found that Queenslanders thought their State was worse treated than any other on meat rationing. Queenslanders forgot, or did not know, that ship after ship had been sent to Queensland from other States carrying food. Also, throughout Queensland, there were stocks of food in retail stores and about a dozen different dumps of food which were used to cushion the shortages created by lack of transport. This plan was working so smoothly that people were not aware of major difficulties. The only things the public heard about were scare stories and allegations of food muddles.

Referring to vegetables, Mr Murphy said that growers were on a marvellous wicket. Every season in past years there had been a period of glut and the market had been glutted with peas and beans and the growers took all this as part of the normal seasonal manifestations. Now they were blaming the government. In Queensland vegetable growers were complaining about the Department’s home vegetable growing campaign on the ground that it was affecting their business. Other people were saying that meat should not be rationed because there were no vegetables to take its place. This was only one instance where public opinion was inconsistent.

120 James Francis Murphy (1893-1949), Secretary Commonwealth Department of Commerce, 1934-45; Controller-General of Food, 1943-45.
Mr Murphy referred to the Sydney story with pictures of the grower who ploughed in 15,000 cabbages. These cabbages had either gone to seed or the grower had taken out the heart, and Mr Murphy regretted that the newspaper should have stirred up public opinion on an inaccurate story which the grower himself had regretted to departmental investigators.

Mr Murphy said that the government was planning on vegetable surpluses. It was manifestly impossible to estimate accurately what public and service requirements would be and it would be better to have too much than too little. The government was buying up unsold peas for canning and growers had sent letters to the Department thanking it. But the Department could not publicise this because it feared an immediate outcry demanding that a minimum price be fixed by the government.

He was trying to plan more even distribution of fresh fruit and he wanted to ensure that there was plenty of fresh milk and cereals. Again, however, manpower and transport were major factors. Rice production was being greatly increased, but all of it would go to the islands.

Mr Murphy said that no plans for rationing additional foodstuffs had been formulated. He was trying to increase the supply of biscuits to civilians, and he was endeavouring to ensure that large supplies of canned fruits would be available.

Going back to Australia’s export commitments he said that, as evidence of the contingencies for which he had to plan, certain new dispositions of the British Navy made it necessary for Australia to find another 15,000 tons of meat. He had told his Minister that if the people of the United States, Canada and Australia cut their butter consumption by another two ounces, British people would be able to secure a full year’s supply equal to their present ration of two ounces a week. As evidence of the need for Australian rationing he said that Britain wanted 70,000 tons of butter but we had been able to supply only 45,000 tons and she wanted 20,000 tons of cheese but we could supply only 10,000 tons.

Mr Murphy was questioned on the price aspect of many primary commodities. He was informed of the high prices of fruit and vegetables and he said that something would have to be done and indicated that he had already
come into conflict with his friend Professor Copland on the price issue. However, he thought many prices would be automatically adjusted in view of the great increase in vegetables and fruit production which he anticipated.

Mr Murphy was reminded that conflict between Ministers on the need for meat rationing a few weeks ago had created an unfortunate public psychology and he agreed that this was so. He was also told that, with an apparent abundance of mutton, people thought they ought to be able to get a bigger ration. He agreed that this idea was held and he said there was probably enough mutton to give people what they needed. But in the first place wool prices were so good that graziers were hanging on to their sheep. The government possessed national security powers to acquire sheep, but arbitrary culling of a flock might spoil it. Further if there was sufficient transport to bring the mutton to where it was wanted, there would probably not be enough slaughtermen or other manpower to handle it.

Mr Murphy was asked about country districts where there were slaughtering facilities and stock nearby which would not need much transport or handling. He admitted that it might be possible to give some country towns more meat but it would be difficult to do it equitably so that an unfavourable comparison could not be drawn by some other town.

26 November 1943

Curtin said today he was greatly concerned over the implications of the Moscow decision regarding a second front in Europe in the spring, which America favours and Russia seeks. This can only be effected at the expense of the forces in the Mediterranean. When the program for the second front was being mounted, it would deprive the Mediterranean of the amount of material which will go into the second front. This must slow up the Italian campaign and might even imperil its success.

Curtin said he had no doubt that Churchill was very worried. This second front program would slow down the allocation to the Australian theatre. It explained the loss of Leros and the attitude of Turkey. The worst feature of
recent events was that apparently the very next day after Eden's talks with the Turks, Von Papen, the German Ambassador in Turkey, had heard about it and the Germans quickly attacked Leros to secure bombing bases against Turkey. The speed with which they had moved demonstrated their resources.

Turning to the South-West Pacific, Curtin said that Rabaul was not going to be easy. A big Japanese force was concentrated there. We were doing to Rabaul what the British were doing to Germany—softening it up. The campaign in the Gilbert Islands was not intended to bypass Rabaul. The Americans would have to build up the Gilberts which would be of great value because the Japs will not know where their naval menace might be located.

Curtin concluded by again referring to Churchill's concern over Leros and other events and said, 'I don't think Churchill is in the United Kingdom now.'

Curtin leaves on Sunday for Brisbane for his conference with MacArthur. He will travel by train. He plans to leave Brisbane on Thursday but it might not be possible for him to do so.

**28-30 November 1943** Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin meet at Teheran conference

**6 December 1943**

Curtin held his first press conference today since his return from Brisbane. He said he did not intend to give any off-the-record review of his talk with General MacArthur at the present stage.

It is quite obvious that Australia, as well as the rest of the dominions, were told nothing about the Cairo conference. Curtin remarked with sarcasm: 'They don't tell us anything.' Any information the Australian Government has had has come from Bruce, who picked it up off his own bat. Curtin was told that the communique from the Teheran conference was in the newspaper offices for release tomorrow, but said he has not even had that.

Curtin said he did not believe that either the Cairo conference or the Teheran conference would change the 'Beat Hitler first' strategy which Churchill was determined upon. However, they had to do something to appease...
Chiang Kai-shek, although if they did, he had not been told anything about it.

He said it looked as though the second front on the French coast was still likely, although personally he would not like this at all because great loss of life would be involved. He pointed to the Tarawa landing in the Gilberts as evidence of how costly a landing on a well-defended coast could be. He personally favoured the throwing in of the Allied armies behind the Russian armies. If the Russians were strong now, this would make them twice as strong and the weight of the Allied armies, he thought, would be irresistible and the push would not be as costly as a landing on the French coast would be. He thought the Allied armies could push through the southeast of Europe where the German defences could not possibly be as strong as they were in France.

Curtin said he had discussed with MacArthur and Colonel Diller in Brisbane the apparent discrepancies in communiques which newspapers had been complaining about for some time. As a result of the discussion he said he was quite satisfied with what was being done and he was satisfied that the communiques were an 'historical record of what happens'. He was quite satisfied that they were compiled with all the care possible on the information that came to Headquarters. We did not always describe our own air losses but there were reasons for this. Reminded about the discrepancies in the communiques relating to the Finschhafen campaign, Curtin said Major General Northcott, the War Council and the government knew all about them. The communiques on the day on which they were compiled were bona fide. The truth of the matter was that one division fell back, leaving the fighting to its supports. That was a tactical mistake but these things happened in war.

The winning of Sattelberg was of little consequence. Finschhafen was the base and Sattelberg's importance was its proximity to Finschhafen. Diller said it was open to correspondents to say what they wanted to say about the communiques. He had no quarrel with the correspondents who put the colour and the glamour into the fighting. It had been suggested, said Diller, that the note of victory in the communiques had been too steady,
but this was the truth. We were not losing battles. It was a matter for the correspondents to write about the cost of victories, the nature of the terrain, the difficulties encountered, and other aspects of the battles. These things could not be put in the communiques every day.

8 December 1943

In reply to questions, Curtin said he knew nothing more about the Teheran conference than the published communique. An effort was made to induce him to admit there was a tie-up between his statement on the Pacific war yesterday and the conferences of Allied leaders in Cairo and Teheran. He declined to be drawn but said: 'I do not care what you say about my statement. I do not propose to add anything to it at the present stage.'

It is still evident that the government has had no detailed communications from London on the conferences. Curtin's demeanour left it quite apparent that his statement yesterday was an attempt to emphasise his view in opposition to those who were still regarding the Pacific war as a 'sideshow'. He was interested to learn that London papers had read significance into the terms and the timing of his statement.

Curtin was asked again about the Victorian coal shortage. In addition to the very short statement he made in his own name, he said, referring to those who were demanding more coal: 'Let them ask Richmond Main to get them more coal.'

The Press Gallery is greatly concerned over Calwell's continued hostility. The latest manifestation has produced something of a controversy over 'Advance Australia Fair'. At his press interview on Monday Curtin was asked
about a statement put out by the Information Department on the playing of ‘Advance Australia Fair’ by the picture theatres at Calwell’s request. When the statement arrived from the Information Department it said that Calwell had asked picture theatres to play the Australian national anthem and when somebody asked the Department what the anthem was the statement was changed to ‘Advance Australia Fair’. When Curtin was asked about it he made the following statement which was subsequently put out by his press secretary, Rodgers, in the form of an official ‘handout’. The statement read: ‘The government does not recognise “Advance Australia Fair”. It is not the official anthem. I will have a look at the records. I do not know of any anthem other than the national anthem, “God Save the King”, which has been adopted as the Australian anthem, but I know that “Advance Australia Fair” has been used extensively as a typical Australian song by the ABC at public meetings and the like and so has “Waltzing Matilda” been sung a lot, particularly in Canada by our airmen.

In the late news session of the ABC on Tuesday night Calwell made a statement in which he said: ‘The Minister for Information said today that a section of the press had deliberately suppressed certain remarks made by the Prime Minister at a press interview yesterday when questions were asked about the playing of “Advance Australia Fair”. What the press failed to report was that the Prime Minister said that the Minister for Information, Mr Calwell, was perfectly entitled to ask picture theatres to play “Advance Australia Fair” or any other anthem he thought desirable.’ Mr Calwell added that there was no statutory provision that made ‘Advance Australia Fair’ or ‘God Save the King’ or any other song the national anthem of Australia. ‘Anthems were made by the people and not by law makers.’
Shortly before midnight I encountered Calwell in the lobbies and he gave me copies of his broadcast statement for distribution among the other press representatives, few of whom he will even talk to. He told me that he regarded the Prime Minister's statement as a rebuke to him.

Today (Wednesday) therefore, Curtin, who remained at the Lodge all day with slight illness, issued the following statement: 'The Minister for Information, Mr Calwell, is perfectly entitled to request the motion picture theatres to play "Advance Australia Fair" or any other anthem if he thinks that it will help build morale. The leaders of the motion picture industry are equally entitled to carry out his request if they so desire.'

As in my report on the first day I adhered to the Prime Minister's official statement. I did not think it advisable to send Calwell's statement because he was rebuking the press for something they didn't deserve a rebuke for and, also, Curtin, being very pliable in such matters, might take sides with Calwell against the press. A small issue surely, but one of the things which makes Calwell so exasperating, and so impossible to deal with!

14 December 1943

Curtin made further reference to censorship at his press conference today. After making a brief comment on the support by Kennedy, Acting President of the Australian Newspaper Proprietors Association, on the suggestion by the New York Times for definite limits to be placed on censorship, Curtin was told by one press representative that there was a tendency among some publicity officers and officials of the government to try and bind newspaper representatives to write along certain lines. Mr Curtin was also told that the off-the-record talk by the Commonwealth Food Controller, Murphy, on the food situation did not tally with the background food statement issued to editors by the Department of Information. Curtin said he knew nothing about that.

Curtin was also referred to a censorship notice issued a few days ago forbidding speculation on the possibility of a payment from No. 5 wheat pool. It was complained to Curtin that this was not security censorship and it

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was recalled that, the day before, the Country Party conference in Melbourne had instructed its parliamentary representatives to press for a payment from this pool. Curtin agreed that this censorship should not have been imposed. He said he knew nothing about the matter. It was subsequently explained that Cabinet apparently ordered the censorship during Curtin's absence last week. There is no suggestion, however, that this particular order will be lifted.

Returning to the general censorship issue, Curtin said that the business of glamorising the war or going into details was essentially the business of war correspondents. The business of the Chief of Staff was to simplify the communique. In the nature of things this must be stilted and confined to major items on the particular day. War correspondents were encouraged to tell their stories and the only limit the command considered should be imposed was that information of use to the enemy should not be conveyed.

Curtin was told that, in a recent speech to Air Raid Precautions officials in Canberra, Lazzarini mentioned a 'devastating' raid on the Drysdale mission early in the Pacific war. The censors deleted the word 'devastating'. Curtin was told that this word revealed that in the communique on the raid at the time the extent of the loss was minimised. Curtin replied that this had been deliberately done to mislead the Japanese. The command considered that if the raid had been described as devastating, the Japs would have sent reconnaissance planes to photograph the extent of the damage and they might then have discovered the aerodrome not far away.

Curtin passed from the censorship discussion to a short reference to the progress of the war. He said he was convinced there was still a very hard task ahead. The Germans were still in Russia, our progress in Italy was slow, and we had regained very little Pacific territory in two years. The Marshall Islands in which the Americans had landed were not important while the Japs still held the Carolines, although possession of the Marshalls made the sea lanes safer.

15 December 1943 United States forces land on New Britain.
20 December 1943

Curtin said today he would not budge on the seamen’s dispute over escort vessels. In order to carry on the war in the north all the escort vessels available were needed there. The seamen said that corvettes would do to protect convoys, but a recent convoy had not only corvettes but destroyers which were over the horizon and were not seen by the seamen. It was necessary to use escort vessels in waters where there was danger. In the strategical assessment they had to be provided where the High Command knew the enemy could hit us. Some of the Dutch ships that were in Australian waters have now been sent to protect the Calcutta-Burma route which left us short of escort vessels. Mr Curtin said that the seamen’s representatives told him that seven corvettes were in Sydney Harbour last Sunday. That was quite true but three days later five of them were on the way north.

‘If it was not Christmas or if an election in the Seamen’s Union was not pending, there would be no trouble,’ said Curtin. Nothing had happened on the Australian coast since April and there had been no convoys from Fremantle to Melbourne since the 9th Division returned. ‘We just cannot provide the ships for the trade,’ added Curtin. ‘It is utterly impossible to authorise more escort vessels without weakening the position in the north.’

Mr Nash will arrive in Sydney from New Zealand tomorrow. He will stay three or four days before going on to Washington. Some weeks later the New Zealand PM, Mr Fraser, will arrive in Australia for conferences with Curtin.

Curtin will probably leave for the west on Sunday night. His arrangements depend on War Cabinet tomorrow. He said that Mrs Curtin wants him to come home, but he had told her it would mean leaving Forde in charge in the east and, as had happened before, this had not saved him from a daily avalanche of telegrams and telephone messages. He said that although he might look well, he did not feel very well and the doctor had told him he must take a rest. If he goes to the west he will remain there a fortnight or so. Tomorrow War Cabinet will arrange dates for a meeting of Premiers, a meeting of the Loan Council and the date

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126 Sir Walter Nash (1882-1968), English-born New Zealand politician, Deputy Prime Minister of New Zealand and leader of special mission to the United States during World War II.

127 Peter Fraser (1884-1950), Labour Prime Minister of New Zealand, 1940-49.
for the opening of Parliament, which looks like being 9 February. The session may last about two months on present indications.

The consulate mainly concerned in the liquor black-marketing allegations is the Argentine Consulate. The man mainly concerned is the trade representative or trade commissioner. Activities of certain officials at other unnamed consulates are also being investigated. The authorities are sorry the story of the liquor black market broke in the press because they were after the Argentine man for 'something bigger'.

22 December 1943

Curtin will leave Canberra on Friday morning by car for Melbourne en route to Western Australia. From the time he leaves Canberra until he returns three weeks later, his movements will be subject to censorship. He will give no interviews and make no statements during his absence from Canberra, all statements in his name being issued from Canberra. He proposes to be back in Melbourne by about 17 January where he will pick up his car for Canberra. During his absence no Cabinet meetings will be held.

Curtin dismissed as untrue two stories published in some newspapers this morning on the future movements of Churchill and MacArthur. The Sydney Daily Telegraph suggested that the government was going to invite Churchill to Australia to recuperate. Curtin said there was no truth in this and expressed displeasure that the story had been written. He said it would be silly for Australia to ask Churchill to make a fatiguing plane journey to Australia, especially as his state of health had made it necessary for him to travel by steamer to the Middle East conferences. In any case no such invitations were ever issued by any government unless they would be accepted. Publication of the story was embarrassing both to Churchill and to the Australian Government. A formal denial would make it appear that Australia was churlish and would not think about inviting Churchill to come here.

Regarding MacArthur, a cable message suggested that he would return to America soon to confer with
the President and military leaders, and at the same time would assess the strength of the 'MacArthur for President' movement.

Curtin said MacArthur could not go out of his theatre without the permission of the government which sent him there. The Australian Government knew nothing about the proposal that he should return to America. Curtin, who was speaking to MacArthur in Brisbane a week or two ago, said MacArthur’s ambition was still to plant the American flag in Bataan as soon as possible.

Major General R. Sutherland, MacArthur’s Chief of Staff, is visiting Canberra tomorrow to confer with Curtin. Sutherland was at Cairo for the recent conference. The New Zealand Minister to Washington, Nash, will also be in Canberra tomorrow. The date of the conference between Curtin and the New Zealand Prime Minister, Fraser, has not yet been fixed.

Curtin made special reference to a cable message published in some morning papers revealing that an airline was operating between Ceylon and Australia. Existence of this line was revealed by Curtin off the record some weeks ago. He said he was not blaming the papers for publishing the story, but the Communications Censor should have stopped it. It was a very hazardous undertaking and important military personnel were using it. It passed quite close to Japanese-held bases, and the planes had just enough petrol for the long journey. If they were attacked or had to fly off their course to avoid Japanese planes, they could not reach their destination. Curtin said he does not propose to impose a censorship on further reference to the line but he makes a request to all papers to exercise a voluntary censorship. He added that the Governor-General, Lord Gowrie, might use this plane on his homeward journey in order to visit the grave of his only son who was killed in the Middle East.

2 January 1944 United States forces land at Saidor, northern New Guinea.

17 January 1944 Australian Prime Minister, John Curtin, and New Zealand Prime Minister, Peter Fraser, lead delegations at an Australian-New Zealand conference in Canberra.
19 January 1944

The censorship authorities censored an item written by this office on proposals to meet the problem presented by pregnant unmarried members of the women's services. Last September a committee of departmental and service personnel was appointed to report to the government, and its recommendations were received last week.

The committee reported a great increase in the numbers of members of the women's services requiring special treatment, particularly in Queensland. The committee reported that it was the responsibility of the Commonwealth to see that these women were properly cared for on the grounds that they were taken from the 'moral anchor of the home and thrown into the vortex of wartime hysteria'. Their recommendations were: (1) All women wishing to enter the services should be medically examined by gynaecologists if necessary. (2) Women becoming pregnant while members of a service should be immediately discharged, but suitable accommodation should be found for them until they can be re-employed. (3) Special annexes financed by the Commonwealth should be added to several Australian civil hospitals for confinements of service women. (4) Allowances should be made to each discharged woman by the Commonwealth in accordance with the normal scale of subsistence allowance plus 17 shillings and 6 pence per week, allowances to be made from the time of discharge to the end of the after-care period or until the woman is in a fit position to take up civilian work.

The censor declined to pass the item because of its possible effect on enlistments to the women's services, but he said that if an announcement could be made by a Minister, the message would be passed in that form. So far there is no indication that a Minister will father (?) the story!

Curtin, at his first interview since his return from the west, said that Kenney and Air Marshal Jones were in the United States on the question of aircraft. Some of the aircraft that had been sent here recently had not been up to specifications. Because of operations on other fronts, also, all the aircraft this theatre had been promised had not been forthcoming, and Kenney and Jones were trying...
to get the balance. Curtin said that every time there was any sort of offensive in Europe, allocations to this theatre dropped.

Curtin was asked about a remark by Sir Ronald Cross at the official luncheon for the New Zealanders yesterday 'that he hoped important United Kingdom forces would come here to join the Australians and New Zealanders'. Curtin said that this would not happen immediately, but before the land forces came here there would be considerable naval strength diverted here.

Curtin would not comment on the recall of Sturdee from Washington, but he left the impression that he would have an important appointment here.

In Curtin's speech to the conference with New Zealand today, he mentioned a conference of Chiefs of Staff to be held before the Empire Prime Ministers Conference. He would not elaborate publicly on this, but said privately that the conference would relate to a move to have New Zealand included in the South-West Pacific sphere with Australia, instead of in the South Pacific sphere.

25 January 1944  Australian troops clear Shaggy Ridge in Ramu Valley, New Guinea

26 January 1944

The press was admitted to the Premiers Conference throughout the proceedings yesterday, but was unable to report two items of the agenda—the use of internees and prisoners of war, and civil aviation. Note-taking during discussion of these items was prohibited but press representatives were permitted to remain and listen.
Internees: The Director-General of Health, Dr Cumpston, will not allow enemy aliens or prisoners of war to be used on farms in irrigation areas for health reasons, according to the Director-General of Manpower, Mr Wurth, in reply to submissions by the Victorian Premier, Mr Dunstan.

Mr Dunstan said that unless additional manpower was made available in Victoria, particularly for rural industries, Victoria's food production would seriously deteriorate. Food production in Victoria had been seriously hampered because of insufficient labour. Men were wanted to clean out the water channels so that water could be supplied to farmers. He had suggested that internees or prisoners of war should be used for this job. After Mr Wurth's explanation, Mr Dunstan said he accepted the position, but he asked Mr Wurth to confer with the Victorian Deputy Director of Manpower on the manpower position generally. Wurth agreed to do this.

Mr Wurth said internees who were naturalised British subjects and enemy aliens were being used in food production and other high priority industries. Two hundred and fifty internees had been made available to Western Australia, for instance. Wurth also intimated that releases would probably be made from the Allied Works Council to perform the work mentioned by Mr Dunstan.

Mr Curtin told the conference that the Allied command could not be expected to treat the people of Italy with kid gloves, but it also had to be borne in mind that the command was out to show the Italians the difference between Allied and Fascist control. For that reason in Australia there was some reluctance on the part of the government to force interned Italians to do some particular work.

Mr Forde said that Italian prisoners of war in Australia now totalled about 7000 and they were being used mainly on the food program. There was a disinclination to make use of German prisoners, who number about 2000, because of their truculent behaviour. They could be worked only under armed guard and in one part of Victoria they had been returned to their compound for discipline because of their behaviour. Mr Forde said there were now about 1000 Japanese prisoners in Australia. They comprised 500 from New Guinea and 500 seamen captured on ships when war broke out. Of these, some hundreds.
were working in the Cowra and Hay districts but they were not as satisfactory as the Italians on food work. They had to be watched closely at the Germans. Mr Forde said some 6000 Italian internees had been released for return to their properties at the behest of the Director-General of Manpower and arrangements were being made for the release of another 1000.

**Civil Aviation:** The Minister for Air, Mr Drakeford, told the conference that the Commonwealth Government intended to build on the air foundations already laid, so that when the time came Australia would be in a position to play its part in the development of aerial services.

The Commonwealth would advise the States on the selection of civil dromes and would only assist in their construction where they would be used as part of trunk routes. No definite plan for aerial expansion had yet been formulated. That would come only after the war. In Melbourne, however, it was certain that Essendon aerodrome would become probably the largest civil aerodrome in the Commonwealth. There was no plan under which the government could hand over RAAF dromes, but those obtained from municipalities and private people would certainly be returned to them.

Drakeford said he envisaged a network of aerodromes throughout the Commonwealth within a radius of 150 to 300 miles from one another. It was proposed to carry all first-class mail by plane and deliver it within 24 hours of the time posted. It was not yet decided where feeder services would operate. The Tasmanian Government had put forward plans to the Civil Aviation Department and an engineer investigated their proposals. He said the Tasmanian Government would be well advised to secure some of the sites contemplated now so as to avoid a rush of people wanting to snap up the land to increase its value before acquisition.
Curtin gave the Premiers a review of the war, details of which he did not disclose to press representatives. Premiers said however that they were impressed and expressed the view that Curtin's speech should be made public. Curtin said it contained much security material, but at a later stage he would incorporate the main points of the speech in a statement—probably the one he would make to Parliament next month.

At his press conference on Wednesday, Curtin, commenting on the need to keep the Army to the requisite level, and the difficulties associated with this policy, said that since the AIF was formed there had been over 90,000 discharges for sickness, hardship and a variety of other causes apart from casualties. More than 4000 men a month had been released since Cabinet's decision to build up manpower in essential industry, and approximately a similar number had been discharged during the past three months for a number of reasons not associated with the release policy. The Allied Works...
Council personnel had been reduced from 58,000 to 35,000. The Commander-in-Chief had been ordered to return 1500 men a week from New Guinea on leave. A complete division was being relieved in New Guinea and it would be replaced.

Curtin said people were saying that the Army was growing 'too fat' because they saw a lot of soldiers about the cities. There were many reasons why soldiers might be in the cities. They might be spending leave, they might have a day off pending transfer to other stations, they might be on sick leave or they might be on a base job. It was only natural that in leisure periods they should drift to the cities for entertainment. Curtin said that only a year ago people were saying that he was preventing the Army from getting enough men to march to the gates of Tokyo.

Curtin declined to comment on Lord Halifax's Toronto speech. He said he did not want to 'buy' into anything. He thought at first that the statement might have been made after consultation with Mackenzie King, but later comment ruled this out.

Curtin was very worried over the strike situation and he admitted he had no remedy. He said he was willing to consider suggestions from anybody who could solve the continuing difficulty with the miners. Evatt declined to comment on the situation at all.

31 January 1944 United States forces invade Marshall Islands

31 January 1944

Curtin was asked today why the Australian Government had not made any references to Japanese atrocities up to the present. He said the United Kingdom and United States governments had been bitterly opposed to reports being released. As the Chicago Tribune was determined to publish the story from its own correspondents, it was then decided to release the story to give it a quasi-official appearance. Curtin said that apparently there was no effective censorship in America of this kind of thing. Curtin subsequently made the comment for publication and this was followed by Evatt's statement on the appointment of Justice Webb.
Curtin was asked several questions bearing on statements made by speakers at the Political Science School. Menzies’ statement supporting a prosperous Germany and Japan was particularly referred to him, but he said he would not say anything. ‘Bob is in enough trouble, anyhow,’ he added. He said he was a bit perplexed about Nash’s comment in America that Japan must have room to expand. Personally he was not disposed to give the Japs a place in the sun.

Curtin said he had yesterday ‘a pleasant interview’ with General Lumsden, Mr Churchill’s personal representative. General Lumsden, he thought, would give Mr Churchill a very favourable report. Curtin said he was pleased with Lumsden’s judgement of the Australian war effort and his statement that Australians were the best fighters, with Britishers second and Americans third. No public reference would be made to the capacity in which General Lumsden was visiting Australia.

Curtin then went on from this point to refer briefly to ‘second front’ plans. He said he thought any western front invasion plan was a bad one because of the terrible casualties involved. He was a bit pessimistic about it. He feared the target date would not be reached on time and he felt that Mr Churchill was worried about this too. Curtin said he did not think the forces which could be landed would be equal to the Germans. In Italy things were going very slowly and there the forces were about equal. He had the idea the Germans were husbanding their air power, and he also had an idea that they were husbanding their manpower on the Russian front. Churchill’s original plan was to go through the soft underbelly of Europe. The British regarded the Balkans as one of the decisive areas for determination of the European struggle but the Americans seemed to be ‘sold’ on the idea of a western front.

3 February 1944

Curtin said he thought it might be possible to get a few more pounds from beer and tobacco duties. When it was suggested that revenue might be helped by increased beer production, he said there was a manpower problem in relation to malt transport and other factors.
Sir Iven Mackay's appointment will be reciprocated by India, but there may be some delay as the man chosen may not yet want to come.

Several queries have been made to Curtin about complaints by United States newspapers on the Anzac Pact. Most of these complaints have come from papers like the Chicago Tribune and Curtin will not reply. His only comment is that there has been just as much comment the other way. Reports to the government show that the details of the pact had wide publication in the United States as well as in Great Britain.

Curtin still refuses to comment on Sturdee's future. He said if he were to be appointed to a command it would not be announced. Sir John Lavarack\(^{136}\) will meet Sturdee in Washington before the latter leaves for home.

Curtin confirmed a Moscow shortwave radio report that Keith Officer\(^{137}\) is leaving Moscow to become Charge d'Affaires at Chungking. Sir Frederick Eggleston is coming home to Australia on recuperative leave. Asked whether Eggleston would return, Curtin said he was not sure but that Eggleston was not leaving Chungking because he was retiring. Chungking was a difficult place to live in and Eggleston's health had suffered. Curtin said he himself felt that Eggleston had earned the right to be the judge of what was the appropriate thing to do regarding his future. Curtin would not authorise anything for publication on the subject as Eggleston is en route.

The Governor-General was ill today. Curtin seemed concerned, but would not say what the nature of the illness was. Nothing will be announced unless it is included in a Government House bulletin.

Curtin had heard nothing today (Thursday) of a proposal that the Australian Council of Trade Unions should see him again on industrial questions. He said he was a bit fed up with the fact that the ACTU had conferences, made decisions and then was unable to carry them out.

A press representative referred to Curtin today an order said to have been issued by the Army authorities on Monday forbidding Army personnel from writing anything for publication. The ban was said to include even fiction and poetry. Curtin said he would be surprised if this were so and he would have enquiries made. War Cabinet's

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137 Keith Officer (1889–1969), diplomat; counsel, Tokyo, 1940–41; interned 1941–42; Charge d’Affaires, Moscow, 1943; Charge d’Affaires, Chungking, 1944–45.
ruling on this matter, made some time ago, was that there should be no strategic or tactical analyses made by Army personnel. The ruling was directed mainly against broadcasts, as at the time there were Army officers who were making broadcasts. The question was a difficult one as every effort was made to separate a soldier from his civil occupation and he did not know whether it would be desirable to permit a man to earn additional income by his writing when men with other occupations could not so profitably spend their leisure time. Also it might be possible to lampoon a superior officer in a seemingly simple poem.

Curtin has now received a request from Dunstan seeking Herring’s release from the Army. The PM commented that he had not heard from Dunstan until he had made certain remarks for publication yesterday. Curtin said he hadn’t yet heard whether Herring wanted to be released. Herring, he would say, was in the same position as a soldier whose release for rural work was sought but who refused to leave the Army. There is gossip here that Herring will not be sorry to leave the Army as he doesn’t hit it off too well with Blamey. What foundation there is for this report I do not know.

Curtin was told of Churchill’s announcement in the House of Commons that a Prime Ministers conference would be held. He replied briefly: ‘The meeting will be a full one. I am going, but I cannot say when, where or how.’ Questioned further, he said that the basic topic of the talks would probably be manpower as this was a problem in all countries. He did not know the agenda but he had a number of questions he wanted to put forward. He did not know if he would see eye to eye with the Canadian Prime Minister, Mr Mackenzie King, on some (unspecified) matters. Curtin attached no credence to a report in the Sun Pictorial that Beasley, Drakeford and Evatt would accompany him to London. He said he knew nothing at all about it and, so far as he was concerned, there was no truth in it. He added smiling: ‘There may be a current blowing somewhere that I need to watch but I don’t know.’
4 February 1944

Curtin got a reply from the Army Department on the writing ban imposed against members of the military forces. This was, in effect, a reaffirmation of the previous War Cabinet decision which was made at the time when Lieutenant General Bennett\[139\] was disposed to talk after his return from Singapore. The memo from the Army Department stated that there was no objection to a soldier writing anything as long as military or operational subjects were not discussed. It would be necessary in such cases to secure the OK of the Army Public Relations Department. Curtin was asked whether Salt\[140\] would be affected, but he said that all matter appearing in Salt had to be okayed by the Public Relations Department. Incidentally he paid a tribute to Massey Stanley for the improvement in Salt.

Curtin said that Britain and America were sorry about the newspaper discussion on the reasons for applying sanctions against Spain because it gave the enemy propagandists some material to work on. American newspapers were responsible for breaking the story. America was not giving Spain any more oil until she stopped sending wolfram and other essential goods to Germany. The Allies also thought Spain ought to behave better by calling back her Blue Division which was fighting against Russia. There was also a suspicion that some of the oil we were sending her was getting to Germany through France.

Forde denies that there has been friction between Herring and Blamey. Herring had objected to Blamey in his presence about Blamey’s overemphasis in public speeches to his (Herring’s) state of health but, so far as he could see, the exchange was jocular. It was a fact, however, that Herring had had two attacks of malaria and he was not keeping very good health. He was 51 years of age and there was some doubt about whether he could continue to stand up to the rigours of the New Guinea campaign.

Lord Gowrie has a heart condition which is causing some worry, although, as yet, no serious concern. It is said that against advice he went out to see a nearby bushfire and that he took ill as a result of that excursion. He went

\[139\] Lieutenant General Gordon Bennett (1887-1962), Commander, 8th Division, Malaya, 1941-42; Commander, 3rd Army Corps, Perth, 1942-44; retired and transferred to reserve of officers, 1944.

\[140\] Salt, an official Army newspaper directed to members of the military services, was edited by Massey Stanley, a former senior journalist in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Press Gallery.
to Canberra Hospital where a cardiograph was taken. It has been sent away for reading by a specialist and in the meantime Gowrie has been ordered to remain in bed.

Curtin said the object of the invasion of the Marshalls was to get air bases from which to attack the Carolines which would be much more difficult to take. It was all part of a synchronised movement against enemy bases including Rabaul and Truk.

A few days ago, it will be recalled, Curtin expressed doubt about whether the target date for the invasion of Western Europe would be achieved. Today (Friday) he said Montgomery’s\textsuperscript{1} statements to troops in England—that he did not believe in undertaking anything he could not finish—indicated a delay in making the invasion and a need for more manpower from the United Nations, including the British Commonwealth. Obviously the plans contemplated would not be completed in time. At present a dispute was going on between Mr Churchill and the Chiefs of Staff. They held conflicting views about what should be done. Churchill wanted to make representations to President Roosevelt to vary some of the Cairo decisions but the Chiefs of Staff would not agree. This did not involve very much however and sounded worse than it really was.

Curtin again referred feelingly to the difficulties of invading Europe and said he wouldn’t like to be among the poor—s who would undertake it.

Curtin said that our air war would have to be of a much more coordinated type. There must be the requisite number of particular types of aircraft, together with personnel and equipment. There would have to be great fighter protection for our forces whereas up to now bomber strength had mainly been used. Asked whether this would mean an acceleration of the fighter building program, Curtin said that it might mean that more personnel would be needed to man the planes.

Curtin said he still thought it possible to put Japan out of action first, but that was not the plan. In order to maintain the plan, we might be called upon greatly to reduce the impact of our campaign against the Japs. He thought that Britain and the United States had taken on a much more formidable enterprise than they first thought. They would have to attack a coastline that was heavily defended. They would have to fly their planes low

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\textsuperscript{1} Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery (1887–1976), Commander, 8th Army, Mediterranean, 1942-44; Commander-in-Chief, British and Allied Armies, Europe, 1944; Commander, 21st Army Group, 1944-45.
over heavy anti-aircraft defences whereas now bombers flew very high above them. They would need a great number of ships, and equipment would have to come from the United States, which meant a lot more ships. Men and equipment would have to be landed from barges because the enemy would not be considerate enough to leave docks. Landing troops would have to wear down the defenders and then establish themselves while they were being pounded by heavy artillery.

Curtin showed irritation with Evatt on two occasions this week. Firstly, after Curtin had commented on the Jap atrocities, Evatt issued his long statement on Justice Webb’s commission. Curtin in a somewhat truculent manner asked next day that we should make it clear that Webb has been working for some months. He also asked whether ‘certain people’ were aware that there had been a censorship on Webb’s commission for months. Today, Curtin was asked about Evatt’s statement on Sir Frederick Eggleston’s return. Curtin, it will be recalled, yesterday spoke off the record about Eggleston’s return and mentioned that he wanted nothing said in view of
possible danger to Eggleston en route. When shown Evatt's statement, he said with some bitterness, 'It's a great world, isn't it?'

You have probably heard that the head of the Australian Information Bureau in New York, Dave Bailey, was considering leaving his job to take over a position with the Sydney Morning Herald. It was also said that Alwyn Lee, the second in command, was going to the Daily Mirror. There have been some heated exchanges between Calwell, Bonney and Bailey. Bailey, I believe, was reminded that a manpower transfer would be necessary before he could leave his job. More reasonable appeals were made on the score of the good work he was doing for Australia. It now seems that he will stay in New York, but of Lee nothing has been heard for a while. Bailey has been asking for more assistance and more money. He will get both. Also Bailey will come back to Australia for a visit to renew his contacts.

10 February 1944

Curtin said he had ordered the censoring for overseas of all references in the House and the Senate to the transfer of Australian senior Army officers to other posts. He had done this after consultation with Menzies. Curtin explained that General Morshead is in charge of operations of the Australian Army in New Guinea. Lavarack has been sent to the United States as head of the military mission in that country for the very reason that Menzies was talking about—that the general strategy of hitting at the heart of Tokyo had to be made by the combined Chiefs of Staff. Lavarack, having a high reputation in military circles, will have influence in his discussions with senior officers including Sir John Dill. His appointment to the United States was discussed with the Lethbridge mission and with Mr Churchill's representative in Australia, General Lumsden. Sturdee is coming back and will be given an active post.

142 In October 1943 a British mission headed by Major General J.S. Lethbridge visited Australia to study and report on the war in the region. Afterwards, Lethbridge recommended that Australia would be a more suitable base than India when Britain was able to return to playing a role in the Pacific.
at the present time, although the Burma campaign would not of course be a big show this year.

Rowell has been attached to the British forces at the request of the British Army.

Curtin said he greatly regretted losing Herring but it had been represented to him that there was doubt about whether Herring, after two bouts of malaria, would be available for an operational job outside the mainland, and as he learned Herring desired to accept the office of Chief Justice of Victoria, and that the Victorian Government was very anxious to get him, he had acquiesced to his release.

16 February 1944 United States task force attacks Truk, Caroline Islands.

29 February 1944 MacArthur's forces invade Admiralty Island.

2 March 1944

Australia has replied in the affirmative to a question by Britain as to whether she approves of proposed conditions for peace between Finland and Russia. According to Curtin, the armistice is 'not far off'.

The Canada–Australia mutual aid agreement will be announced in a week or so. This agreement is the outcome of the Canadian Bill passed some months ago to distribute a billion dollars in goods among the United Nations.

Curtin held his first press interview today since last Thursday when he went to Melbourne. The story given out at the time was that he was going to Melbourne to visit a relative. The real story is that he was there for an extremely important conference with the Chiefs of Staff, which lasted until Monday. Curtin said the conference was on the significance of a Japanese concentration of warships at Singapore. The concentration is very large and much bigger than anything we have in the Indian Ocean or are likely to have for some time. However, there are no transports in the concentration, so no invasion move is considered likely. A number of possibilities arise from this concentration of warships. One is that Singapore
is being used by the Japs as a funkhole. They have pulled ships out of the Pacific following the American moves and they may be keeping them in Singapore rather than send a defeated armada back to Japan.

The concentration might mean that the Japs intend to make a big sweep of our lines of communication in the Indian Ocean. They may have it in mind to bombard Trincomalee. They may come down the coast of Western Australia—this involving the destruction of Cocos Island and its important communications.

However, the greatest possibility is that the fleet may bombard Darwin. We were concentrating very considerable warship strength at Darwin and we had in contemplation the construction of one of the biggest air bases in the world there. The object of this base was to provide a striking centre for attacks on the Philippines and Java.

Curtin said the Japs had saved their face in the Pacific by dismissing commanders responsible for recent defeats. There would now never be any danger to the eastern side of Australia.

Curtin said his meeting with the ACTU was accidental. He discussed two matters with the ACTU. One was the delay in ship repairs in Sydney due to the ban on overtime. The other was the coal shortage which assumes new importance as the result of the pending moves.

Curtin advised a close watch on what would happen in the weeks to come around Australia. He said we were concentrating submarines and aircraft in large numbers. The subs would watch the Sunda and Macassar Straits and they had been instructed to watch for significant movements and to take the risk of breaking radio silence to acquaint the Australian authorities with what they saw.

Turning to censorship Curtin said he did not propose to grant a Royal Commission on the question. He said the Opposition would not be very happy about a Royal Commission because the censoring was being done under orders which they had formulated when in government. Curtin justified the censorship and mentioned the recent case of a letter from Hobart which, when opened by Perth censors, disclosed an important troop movement.

7 March 1944  Japanese invade India on the Manipur Plains near Imphal
7 March 1944

Curtin had a cable from Churchill on the concentration of the Japanese fleet at Singapore. Churchill’s conclusions are along similar lines to Curtin’s. (See briefing of 2 March 1944.)

Curtin said that Britain was endeavouring to build up naval strength of the Eastern Fleet but the additions would now be of the battleship class. They would generally be ships of smaller class but they might include a couple of aircraft carriers. Churchill thinks that, outside sporadic raids on the west coast of Australia, this country has not much to fear from the Japanese concentration.

The Cabinet yesterday approved expenditure on the development of air facilities at Darwin. Concrete runways would be built to accommodate heavy bombers. This work would cost about £1.5 million. Part of it would be completed in three months and the remainder in eight. The work would make a valuable target for Japanese bombardment, so all the dive bombers we can muster are being sent to strips along the northern coast of Australia.

We made one of the biggest operational movements of the war in the west during the weekend. Japanese warships were detected proceeding south from Singapore. This was one reason for the air raid alert in Perth during the weekend. We got everything in readiness for an attack but the Japanese ships turned back.\(^\text{143}\)

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11 March–June 1944  Prime Minister Curtin visits the United States and Britain for talks with Roosevelt and Churchill, and to attend the British Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference in London in May.

31 March 1944  Russian Red Army enters Romania.

3 April 1944  United States forces occupy Bikini and other Marshall atolls.

15 April 1944  Sydney’s *Daily Telegraph* leaves blank spaces on its front page indicating that material has been censored, beginning a wartime censorship fad.

16 April 1944  The *Sunday Telegraph* publishes material banned by the censors. Commonwealth police stop the presses and confiscate newspapers.
Who Put Australia on the Map?
"The bitterest political opponents will have to admit that Mr Curtin has done a good job for Australia at the Empire Conference. He has put Australia on the map."—from London to the Sydney Sun
Cartoon by Norman Lindsay
Bulletin, 24 May 1944

17 April 1944  All Sydney newspapers reprint the censored material and are banned from distributing their papers; the newspapers take out a High Court injunction to test the powers of the censors and subsequently win their fight when, one month later, the Commonwealth Government relaxes censorship restrictions.

24 April 1944  Australian troops enter Madang, New Guinea

26 April 1944  Allied forces land at Hollandia and Aitape, New Guinea

28 April 1944

At this press interview last night the acting Prime Minister, Mr Forde, said that while in London the Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, would seek the transfer of some cruisers or destroyers from the British fleet to Australia. Mr Forde was rather cautious in giving this information but intimated that they might be gift ships and would be given to Australia on the condition that we manned them.

He gave these details when questioned about the HMAS Sydney. He said the government could not yet decide whether the new cruiser being built there would be named the Sydney and thus absorb some of the replacement fund money until it had been learned whether one of the new ships to be transferred from Britain might be renamed the Sydney.

Mr Forde’s business in Sydney tomorrow, I understand, concerns censorship.
3 May 1944

At his press conference today Mr Forde disclosed the arrival in Australia of Admiral Daniel, described by Sir Guy Royle as 'the brightest man in the British Navy'. He was at one time in charge of HMS Renown and has just come through America where he discussed naval matters with Admiral Nimitz and is now touring Australia to ascertain the suitability of bases for the employment of British naval units at a later stage in the war, presumably as soon as Germany is defeated.

Mr Forde said Admiral Daniel addressed War Cabinet and, when asked when he thought the war against Germany would be over, replied promptly: 'By October next'. Of course, Admiral Daniel hastened to add that was his own personal opinion. Mr Forde said they did not ask from him information as to when the second front was scheduled to start, although they knew he had this information.

Admiral Daniel indicated the British were just aching to have ships in these waters flying British flags. The admiral is in Melbourne today. He is giving no press interviews, as his presence and business is so confidential.

Mr Forde mentioned that the British were content to allow the Italian fight to keep on at the same tempo purely for the reason of keeping some German divisions pinned down so as to make the second front a little easier.

9 May 1944

At his press conference last night Mr Forde released the official report of the circumstances surrounding General Blamey's withdrawal from Greece. The report reads:

The supreme command was held by an English general, General Wilson. When the Greek Government found it impossible to maintain Greek resistance to the Germans any longer, it requested the British Government to withdraw the Allied forces.

General Wilson's duties necessitated his presence in Athens. He directed General Blamey to conduct the withdrawal to the coast from Mount Olympus, a distance of over 200 miles, in the face of overwhelming German forces.

145 Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz (1885-1966), Commander-in-Chief, United States Pacific Fleet, 1941-45.
In the meantime, an organisation under General Wilson’s direction made arrangements for the embarkation of the forces. General Blamey conducted the retreat until the forces came under cover of the final covering position when the forces again passed to the command of General Wilson for embarkation.

Under instructions from the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Forces, General Wavell, General Wilson ordered General Blamey to emplane immediately for Alexandria with seven of his staff, of whom Major Blamey was one. The instructions were that they should report progress and arrange further coordination of further embarkation with Admiral Cunningham.\footnote{Admiral Sir Andrew Browne Cunningham (1883-1963), Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean, 1943.}

General Blamey carried out his task with such skill in Greece as to secure the award of the KBE on the strong recommendation of General Wavell. He was also decorated by the Greek Government.

Mr Forde said the Singapore incident had not been instrumental so far as General Blamey was concerned for General Bennett’s failure to secure a higher post than he had done. General Blamey had told him quite candidly he did not think he was the man who could take the command now held by General Morshead.

The fact that the government had completely exonerated General Bennett, and the fact that General Blamey himself had recommended General Bennett’s promotion after Singapore, indicated that there was nothing personal in the Bennett affair. The whole thing was that General Blamey considered there were better men for high Army posts in New Guinea than General Bennett.

12 May 1944

At his press conference tonight Mr Forde said the Australian High Commissioner, Mr Bruce, had a long interview with a Spaniard who had just returned from Germany. Mr Bruce, who placed much reliance on the interview, cabled that Berlin through RAF batterings was now almost unrecognisable. The morale of the people was extremely low and they now had lost all hope that Germany would win the war. They were very apathetic and were extremely hostile to the Gestapo, yet feared to make a false move. Air Raid Precautions (ARP) apparently were in a very bad state and thousands of people were sleeping at night in street gutters.
Mr Forde said he had received an important cable from Mr Bruce. Mr Bruce said: 'The Turkish Ambassador came to see me this morning. I told him I saw where Von Papen had returned from Germany to Turkey. I asked him if he knew Von Papen and what he was like.'

The ambassador replied: 'I know him. He is very intelligent and says he has no sympathy with the Nazis or Hitler. Furthermore Von Papen did not disguise his sentiments but spoke quite openly on the subject. Von Papen would say quite openly he saw no sense in war.'

Mr Bruce said he was surprised that no action was taken against Von Papen by Hitler for these remarks, but the Turkish Ambassador, he said, made no satisfactory reply.

The ambassador added: 'Undoubtedly Hitler's prestige in Germany had been lowered because of the Russian victories. I was in close touch with Germany at the time the Russian venture was taken. Everyone thought a mistake had been made but the general German staff was convinced that although the Russians would fight strongly they would be quickly liquidated. The general impression was the Soviet regime would collapse and the whole campaign would be over in five weeks.'

Mr Bruce said the Turkish Ambassador believed it to be a false hope for Germany to believe it could hold the Russians on a shortened front. The ambassador believed that when the offensive was resumed, the Russians would break through any shortened line. He expressed the confident view that the war in Europe would be over this year.

Mr Bruce said they had also discussed the position of Japan with the defeat of Hitler. On that point the ambassador showed considerable optimism, saying he did not see how Japan would be able to stand up to the combined forces of Britain and America. The ambassador was quite sure the Soviet Union would come into the war against Japan as soon as Hitler was defeated and this accretion of strength would make the forces employed against Japan so overwhelming that the Japanese would be forced to capitulate.
Mr Forde dined with Lord Gowrie when in Sydney and was informed that the Duchess of Gloucester expected her baby next August. Lord Gowrie expects to leave Australia at the end of July by boat as air travel would affect his bad heart.

27 May 1944  United States forces land on Biak Island
6 June 1944  D-Day, Allied forces invade Normandy
13 June 1944  Germany begins flying bomb attacks on Britain
15 June 1944  United States marines invade Saipan, Mariana Islands
16 June 1944  China-based warplanes bomb southern Japan
19–20 June 1944  Naval battle of the Philippine Sea

3 July 1944

Prisoners of war: The flow of Italian prisoners of war to Australia has been suspended for the time being due to lack of shipping, and future shipments will be governed by events. Shipping requirements for the invasion are colossal. The Allies are going into Italy as deliverers.

Shipping: 'I have no announcement to make about British ships coming here to join the Australian Navy but there is a proposal to build up the Eastern Fleet. There has been a change in the command of that fleet but no announcement will be made by me on that.'

Publicity: Speaking of the treatment of war news throughout the world, Mr Curtin said: 'I say to you that press treatment of the war news is in my view the most jaundiced one-eyed piece of journalism. I am speaking of the press as I saw it in the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. Objectively the Australian press gives a far better picture of the global conflict than, for instance, the United States. I would not apply that criticism to the United Kingdom where they are hampered by space restrictions and where they have to maintain delicate diplomatic relations.'

Mr Curtin said this in response to questions about more publicity for Australians abroad and because of complaints that the paucity of information received about
the activity of British troops hindered Australian papers from giving them the space they really deserve.

'What more can I do?' Mr Curtin said with some heat. 'During the past six months I myself as Prime Minister have provided the utmost facilities not only for press delegations to leave this country, officials to visit other countries, but also for editors and proprietors to go overseas.' He mentioned Dunstan (Melbourne Herald), Williams (Brisbane Courier Mail), Henderson (Sydney Morning Herald), Wynne (AAP), Penton (Daily Telegraph) and Sir Keith Murdoch.

'All the time I have been Prime Minister I have not raised one demur to managements sending away men on the highest executive level. I have not chosen these men either. If there is anything wrong with the service they get they cannot expect me to fix it up.'

**Second front:** There are three-quarters of a million men, about 600,000 to be more specific, in Normandy, the greater percentage of whom, although not apparent from the newspapers, are British.

The infiltration is going slower than expected and this applies generally to the whole operation. D-Day, which was no fixed day, was postponed once and, except for the fact that orders could not be recalled, could have been postponed a second time. Orders had to be given 48 hours in advance and, once given, they could not be retracted.

It is hoped to get 2 million men in France within 90 days of D-Day. The fall of Cherbourg, however, is going according to schedule. Referring to the small number of men in France now, 30 days after D-Day, Mr Curtin said: 'The point is you cannot pour troops in unless you have a perimeter. The fighting is going to be hard and difficult. Losses are less than expected. The perimeter must be enlarged. Weather is a complicating factor. It holds up aerial bombing and naval barrages cannot penetrate sufficiently in depth.'
Pacific theatre: Mr Curtin said the tempo of the Pacific operations was satisfactory. It was going according to the plan laid down last June. There were pockets which were left behind. The Japs were evidently throwing themselves into as good a defensive posture as the facts allowed them by cleaning up China with the idea of denying the Allies bases in that country. Mr Curtin said the Japs were certainly making a hard attempt to do this, although he did not know whether they would succeed.

Remarking that we were a fortunate people, Mr Curtin referred to the significance of Milne Bay and asked whether the people realised the significance of it. It was the original trap for the Japanese and would go down in history.

Italian Campaign: There were two opinions about this campaign. The Russians believed all the Mediterranean operations were diversionary, but the British Chiefs of Staff believed Italy was a vital front and Curtin said he shared their view. Losses had been inflicted on German troops there which had reduced their concentration on either the eastern or western front. The point was that the Allies could not have used their forces in France up to now. In Britain the general opinion was that the campaign was one of the vital contributions to victory. Personally he did not know why Hitler did not withdraw to the Alps—probably he feared the loss of the Romanian oil wells and the prestige effect on Axis satellites.

Yugoslav fighting: The invocation of a spirit of unrest certainly weakened the Germans' economic supplies in those areas and paved the way to political stability. Therefore he thought the fight being waged by the partisans in Yugoslavia significant. All countries captured by the Germans had their bands of partisans and the Allies under these circumstances had been very successful in keeping that spirit of aggression alive.

Mr Churchill: Asked for his opinion of Mr Churchill, Mr Curtin said: 'He is the most important person arrayed against our enemies. He is indispensable because I do not know of any other equal who can replace him. He is an inspiration, a driver. He has the complete faith of the British people. He is the master of the House of Commons and no man has yet been its master. The Labour men in
the Cabinet have only one regret—they said he should not have accepted the leadership of the Conservative Party because he was not the leader of that party when they agreed to serve under him. However, these Labour men would see him through to the end of the war and they respected his promise that he would treat them fairly. Nevertheless they agreed that the Conservative Party would make it hard for Mr Churchill to carry out his promise because fundamentally the British Conservative Party was no different from a conservative party in any other country.

Mr Curtin said he personally had got on handsomely with Mr Churchill. Asked if the British Prime Minister would come out here at the end of the European war, Mr Curtin replied: 'Mr Churchill’s invariable answer is "I’d love to go". But his coming, of course, will depend on many factors that cannot be foreseen at this stage.' Mr Curtin said there was nothing of the ‘one man’ suggestion about the conduct of British War Cabinets—run by Mr Churchill alone. No Minister was tongue-tied there and they certainly said what they wanted to. The Cabinet was no different to the Australian Cabinets in their conduct of business.

General Smuts: Whereas Mr Churchill looked every year of his age, General Smuts looked ten years younger than his 75. Mr Churchill seemed to have a great tiredness about him which Mr Curtin said he put down to anxiety about the second front. ‘Mr Churchill fires every shot and suffers every wound.’

Lloyd George: When they met, Lloyd George said: ‘We are two unique men in this world. Neither of us knows how to get coal but everyone else does.’ Mr Curtin said there was a great coal shortage in the United States, Canada and Great Britain.

Aid from Britain: Any idea that millions of men might be based in Australia was poppycock. Plans for the demobilisation of the British Army worked out by Mr Bevin provided for a great contraction of the British armed forces when Germany was defeated. However, there would not be the shipping to bring out one million men to Australia from America or Britain. We had only to remember that the Queen Mary’s maximum load was 8000 men

without equipment to get some idea of the shipping required for carrying troops.

Mr Curtin was asked whether this implied that the promise of great aid from Britain would mean the diversion of great air power and naval strength to this theatre. He replied: 'The British flag will fly. There will be British infantry here. Bear in mind the American forces in this theatre are not so numerous, relative to their strength. It cannot be done. The ships are not there and the shipping demand for Europe is huge.'

Glasgow: Mr Curtin said Sir William Glasgow, the Australian High Commissioner in Canada, wished to return to Australia. His term was up.

Wheat: The Canadian farmer, Mr Curtin said, had to pay 1 shilling and 3 pence in costs to take his wheat from the farm to the ship. The cost to the Australian farmer was 7 1/2 pence, including 3 pence for the bag.

Air conference: Mr Curtin said there would be no ministerial post-war air conference. No country had a policy except the United States, and its policy was to have no policy. The Empire Prime Ministers Conference had whipped the matter up and urged an Empire policy. But for this, and if they had not arrived in Britain to force the matter, Britain would have slept on the matter. One thing to be borne in mind in regard to Empire routes was that in due course the Netherlands East Indies would be cleared and it was a much safer route through that area to Colombo than the new route, Perth to Colombo. It would also be more economical. This Perth-Colombo route was now being developed by arrangement with the United Kingdom Government. It was a secret route. He was not able to talk to Parliament about civil aviation. There was nothing they could humanly do about it that they had not done.

The basic factor with the Americans was that they viewed Honolulu as a suburb. They had control of the route in peacetime. While the British capacity to turn out civil planes was undoubted, they were manufacturing war planes. The greater part of the American capacity was devoted to war machines. Therefore we could not expect a great deal of aircraft available for civil purposes.

Manpower: Mr Curtin said he did not want newspaper editors to become too impatient on this question, which
was bound up with food. He said exports from Australia have now been fixed at the 1944 level. Ships would be the determining factor and fertiliser was another consideration. ‘In the reassessment of manpower, you cannot strip the forces of their efficiency by taking skilled men from key positions. Numbers and quality have to be taken into consideration in order to make up the leeway in certain of our services. To simply tell the Army to give up all the skilled men or experienced men would leave them absolutely flat. We had to exercise some plans for striking a proper balance between the Army and food front. This will apply to the demobilisation plan of the United Kingdom.’

Mr Curtin said there was no way of building up exports of primary industries. He had had a long talk with Lord Leathers,149 British Shipping Minister, who knew that the bulk of the maritime tonnage available was now in the control of the Americans who had built this type of ship, whereas the British had gone in more for naval construction. The demands on tonnage for Russia had been very great. He had seen no country where the manpower problems were as acute as in Australia. All that they had maintained here were the spinal columns of basic industries. If Nauru was taken it would be a year before it would be usable.

MacArthur: The New Zealand Air Force is now under MacArthur’s command and the South Pacific command has been abolished.

Allowances: Mr Curtin said legation officers in Canada and the United States had submitted a good case to him as to why salary and allowances should be increased having regard to the cost of living. Housing was just as acute in those countries because of the shortage of materials. Four or five years of war involved an exhaustion of accumulated stocks.

Uranium: Mr Curtin disclosed that steps had been taken to develop uranium fields in South Australia. This is a vital material necessary for war and Mr Curtin said it could not be obtained anywhere else. The British war effort would be in bad shape if Australia did not commence its production and he had agreed the whole output would go to Britain. Mr Curtin struck at private enterprise by saying that none of these interests had

149 Lord Leathers (1883-1965), United Kingdom Minister of War Transport, 1941-45.
bothered to develop this metal and the work now had to be done by bureaucracy.

Parliament: Mr Curtin said he was eager to meet Parliament.

Bureaucracy: Mr Curtin said that Britain was launching out into a planned economy and had its bureaucrats, boards and commissioners working successfully. 'It seems that the people think you should have a plan as long as there are not planners,' he said.

Liberated Europe would be governed by bureaucracy until it was able to devise governments of their own choosing. Bureaucracy would not give way to these governments either, he said, until the United Nations was assured the governments were not only genuine but that they were not designed for the purpose of revenge or aggression.

Journalists: Mr Curtin issued a strong warning to journalists about leakage of highly confidential information and securing access to documents that might pass between defence authorities of the United Nations. In this connection Mr Curtin disclosed another interesting fact relative to his plans for an Empire Consultative Council. He said that he had arranged through Mr Churchill for the British Ministry of Defence and the Australian Minister of Defence to exchange information freely, not only of decisions but also of portents.

He said that if any of this information should be acquired in any way by journalists, not only would the journalist be dealt with severely but so would any person official or otherwise who had access to the information. 'I would regard such journalists as receivers of stolen goods. He would be guilty of serious breaches. For my part any departmental officer responsible or concerned would no longer be employed by the public service.'

Mr Curtin said these arrangements for consultations between heads of governments would continue. They could not meet every day.

4 July 1944

New censorship code: Mr Curtin said he was surprised and amazed that newspaper proprietors had put their signatures
to a document which said they could have been inaccurate. He did not think such a document could be found anywhere else in the world. If he had been a newspaper proprietor, he would have fought this to the last gasp. The document would go down in Australia's historical annals.

**Reporting of British Parliament:** In spite of space worries English newspapers gave more space to Parliament and more factual reports than Australian newspapers. Even a debate on an educational Bill merited two or three columns daily. On days when Parliament was sitting, the London Times and frequently the London Telegraph published only classified advertising matter, so that adequate space could be given to reports of parliamentary proceedings. These parliamentary reports were never broken out.

**Overseas appointments:** Speaking about Mr Bruce's position, Mr Curtin said that if ever a fantastic piece of nonsense had been published, it was the story that he (Curtin) might stay in London. When he mentioned this statement to a British gallery of pressmen one journalist remarked, 'Surely, that story should have been censored.' When Curtin replied, 'No, no security censorship was involved,' the journalist held that lies about the heads of government were damaging to the war effort. Mr Curtin continued: 'I do think newspapers have a responsibility to avoid misleading the public. If they get hold of such stories they should make enquiries before publishing them and concurrently publish the result of that enquiry with the original story.'

Some of us challenged Mr Curtin on this point and instanced the case where the Sydney Morning Herald once wrote the story of the formation of the Empire air training scheme. It was officially denied next day by the Minister. Yet a fortnight later the same story was announced by the Minister. However, Mr Curtin held that his view was right in most cases. The Bruce story, he said, and the suggestion that he (Mr Curtin) might stay in London could do much harm in as much as the people would say, 'Here is the man who is asking us to accept sacrifices and now he slides out of it into a comfortable five-year job in London.'

**Manpower:** Mr Curtin cleared up some misunderstanding on his earlier statement on manpower. He said what he
intended to convey was this: 'In no belligerent country he had seen were the manpower problems of the civil population less than in Australia. We had maintained the spinal column of all our basic industries.'

I do not know if you received Mr Curtin's off-the-record information, when he arrived at Brisbane, on manpower. However, I will give you now what one of the roundsmen recorded: 'There will be no early reallocation of our manpower resources on a broad scale. The way in which our labour and material resources are spread will be re-examined so that we can make the greatest possible contribution to the United Nations pool. We will have to find a proper balance between the food front industry and the fighting services. Labour difficulties are not confined to Australia—all other Allied countries have similar problems.'

Chicago Tribune: Mr Curtin's press secretary, Mr Rodgers, pointed out during talk of Colonel McCormick that the colonel's attitude was largely due to the fact that a social climbing mother had sent him to one of the best schools in England where he had been snubbed very badly. This had had a remarkable effect on the colonel. Mr Curtin said the paper published some strange editorials by the colonel, who was one of those men who usually did what he paid other men to do. Mr Rodgers said the paper paid good wages and had good conditions which were better than those sought by the CIO Newspaper Guild. The paper had been willed by the colonel to his employees on his death.

6 July 1944

High Court: Mr Curtin was extremely critical of certain members of the High Court. Justice Starke, he said, was suspect and Justice Rich was close on 80. An eminent legal man had told him that the High Court had got off the rails in the censorship case.

The most staggering judgement he had ever heard of was the New South Wales Supreme Court decision on the manpower regulation. The remarks of the Chief Justice might well have been made on the Yarra Bank or in
Parliament. 'If ever I ask the New South Wales Government to set aside a judge for some work, I would not ask for their Chief Justice in view of the intemperate and most ridiculous language he used,' said Mr Curtin, adding after a remark by one roundsman that he had not noticed until now that the statements had been made on the eve of the New South Wales elections.

**Webb report:** Mr Curtin would only permit publication of an innocuous reference to the fact that the Webb report on Japanese atrocities would not be released immediately. He said off the record it might be some time before it was released, if ever. There was strong objection in the United States and Great Britain to the release of atrocity stories. The only result of the release of the report would be the worsening of victims’ conditions.

**Manpower:** In regard to his manpower scheme, Mr Curtin said he would be unable to give to Parliament what would be our strength or the strength of other forces that would be engaged in the war against Japan either in this or adjoining theatres. His scheme would not affect the contribution Australia was making in the fight against Hitler in regard to naval and air force strength which was to be maintained. There would be changes in personnel even though the strength would be maintained.
With regard to men who have been serving overseas for many years, Mr Curtin said arrangements had been made for certain men who had been away a long while to come back to Australia and for them to be replaced by others. A particular quota of this recall and replacement had been set for each month but, while it might fluctuate according to the availability of shipping, the total over a year would be up to schedule. Mr Curtin indicated he was referring mainly to RAAF personnel because he said this honoured the promise he gave the men while overseas.

14 July 1944

Army: Mr Curtin said the strength of the Australian Army today was 430,000, including 20,000 to 25,000 women. He said there would be no reduction in the strength of the Air Force or the Navy.

Censorship: Mr Curtin just conversed generally on this point when questioned about the suggestion from Dr Evatt that, because of pressure of work on Ministers, Justice Clyne be given charge of the censorship committee’s inquiries. He said, for instance, he was asking himself what would the Australian Newspaper Proprietors Association do if the committee recommended certain things which would negate the agreement.

The only thing he would take notice of would be a report or request from the committee and if it reported it had no more business to deal with, then he would make an announcement about its activities. But he could not act on suggestions from Dr Evatt through the press that Justice Clyne should do the work.

If the committee wished to examine publicity censorship, would it take in everything that had happened before the agreement, or would it confine itself to everything that had happened since the agreement? Or did they merely wish to fish in troubled waters?

'I am not saying anything for publication; I am just asking these questions of myself so I can get some picture of the position,' he said. He added that because it was an agreement with the people most concerned—the newspaper proprietors—he would not do anything to upset it unless it was productive of a bad state of.
affairs. He welcomed investigations which led to the improvement of any service.

War: Mr Curtin spoke with great emphasis when he said that his main preoccupation was the war. This was in reply to odds and ends of questions about releasing material for this and that. He said if the Opposition had their way, some of them would have the war as all over and start peacetime programs. He said he did not propose to give much time to the referendum\(^\text{157}\) as the war was pressing more heavily. He would give less time to it than to the elections.

Berryman: Mr Curtin said that Lieutenant General Berryman's\(^\text{158}\) recall from the north fitted in with the government's policy of giving brilliant officers with good war records experience in administration for post-war purposes. However, he would not be taken away from the fighting command.

Curtin's comment on the seamen who were gaoloed in Hobart was inspired by an article in the current issue of Smith's Weekly. The regulation, he said, was gazetted particularly to deal with Chinese seamen who had the habit of deserting as soon as their ships reached Australia. When caught they were held in gaol until they could be deported. The three seamen concerned in the present case were Britshers, but the regulation applied to all persons 'not born in Australia'. Curtin referred to one incident in Fremantle when the Chinese crew mutinied, refused to obey the master's commands, refused to take the ship out to sea, or even to leave it in the harbour, and finally locked the master in his cabin.

Mid-July 1944

Administrative appointments: Mr Curtin allowed us to use some background on this matter, but he said for office information that when bigwigs said they were going to retire, he did not turn a hair because there were many younger men who could fill their places. He was referring to administration of the services both now and after the war. He said he was not going to have pot-bellied blimps running the show.

Wage pegging: There would be no lifting of the wage-pegging regulations, Mr Curtin emphasised. The decision

\(^{157}\) On 19 August 1944 the government put 14 questions to the Australian people seeking Commonwealth powers over: rehabilitation of ex-service personnel; employment and unemployment; marketing of commodities; trusts and monopolies; production and distribution; overseas investment; airlines; uniformity of rail gauges; national health; national works, social security, and Aborigines. All failed.

\(^{158}\) Lieutenant General Frank Berryman (1894-1981), Deputy Chief of General Staff, 1942–43; New Guinea Force, 1942–43; General Officer Commanding 1 Army Corps, 1944; Chief of Staff, Advanced Land Headquarters, 1944–48.
made at the ALP conference at Canberra would stand. 'I would not like to swap the economy of this country for any other I have seen. After the war, if you can see America competing on the open market on the present price levels, I will be surprised. The Americans think that as long as they create a demand, the demand will enable them to sell because supplies are short.'

**Monetary conference:** Mr Curtin said it was a pity the monetary conference was breaking down because the world could well be served by agreement on such an important matter. Whatever was agreed on would not affect Australia. 'We need flexibility about the right to draw on exchange. We are sitting pretty at the moment but no one can look at our position and not realise there will be some shortage of exports. Lord Keynes is anxious to get a settlement for his own reputation’s sake but the British Treasury is not. President Roosevelt is anxious also to get a settlement because he is the spokesman of a strong international policy. The British policy is complicated by there being three parties in the government and the government cannot make up its mind which party is to prevail in the national government.'

**Canberra representation:** Mr Curtin said he was willing and anxious that Canberra should have representation in Parliament, but there was the difficulty that States must be represented in the Senate. If anyone could provide a solution he would be willing to accept it.

**Flying bombs:** Mr Curtin said that Australia House had been out of operation for some days now because it had been hit by a flying bomb. He was waiting on news of the casualties.

**Reprisals:** Mr Curtin said he had received a cable from the British Government saying it is most desirable that no comment should be offered on the French communique stating that French forces of the Interior had shot six German prisoners in retaliation for the execution by the Germans of patriot prisoners.

**Normandy:** Mr Curtin said events were proving the British attitude towards the invasion of Normandy to have been sounder than that of the Americans whose ballyhoo had raised false expectations. It was going to be harder
and sterner than the Americans had thought. An official cable received today states that German resistance was very strong in all sectors but progress was being made. Ships have been lost to U-boats at Le Havre and human torpedoes were being used in the assault area. Nine minesweepers have been lost.

**Rocket guns:** Mr Curtin said he had no confirmation that the Germans would use rocket guns in addition to pilotless planes. The robot machine is launched from a ramp and probably has a rocket-aided take-off. The weight of the warhead and blast effect are comparable to a 1000 kilogram bomb. The speed varies between 250 and 350 miles per hour and the estimated range is about 125 miles. The size is about 25 feet in length with a 16-foot wing span.

The earlier cable stated: During the night of 12 and 13 June the enemy launched its first attack against this country by pilotless aircraft. It is not possible to estimate accurately the number employed but it does not exceed 11. Only four reached the Greater London area. Some are known to have fallen into the sea. It is estimated that the speed varies between 230 and 250 miles per hour. The aircraft crossed the coast at 1000 feet but subsequently rose to 4000 feet. They had small wings with a brilliant white light in the tail. The flight was erratic in some cases. Only four incidents occurred. The first caused some damage and a small number of casualties. The other three caused slight damage only. The matter is not being made public at the moment.

Mr Forde said he had expected General Blamey to have arrived back in Australia by this time. He understood, however, that he had had some difficulty in securing a plane passage at San Francisco.

Mr Forde said the Deputy Coal Commissioner, Mr Jack, expects to get in the next three months a monthly output of 30,000 to 40,000 tons of coal from new open-cut mines which he will develop in New South Wales. Reports from Commonwealth No. 2 of this process have been satisfactory. He asks that nothing be said of this because it would cause strife among miners. Mr Forde said he understood that six open cuts would be working in the next three months.
25 July 1944

Curtin says interpretation of internal events in Germany by overseas authorities is mixed. Cables he has had from Britain express two views—firstly, the fact that Hitler has been able, apparently, to overcome the revolutionary action shows he still wields considerable power; secondly, the revolt, despite its early failure, reveals definite signs of cracking.

The British Government is worried about the robot bomb. It has become more accurate and all now fall within a seven-mile square in the city. Their destructive power is terrific, an estimate being that they wreak more damage than any bomb carried by aircraft. Of 2.5 million houses in London, about 14,000 have been destroyed and 354,000 damaged. These figures came in a cable to Curtin on the robot bomb and he believes they refer to damage done by the bomb and not to damage done in London since the start of the war.

During the past few weeks diplomatic exchanges have become exceptionally heavy—so heavy that Curtin said today they almost demanded his entire attention. He said the minds of governments were being shaped and the interchange of views was therefore very great.

Asked about the present position of Polish–Russian relations, Curtin said that for the time being the matter had been pushed into the background principally because events today were moving faster than discussions. It must be said in fairness to the Russians that they had advanced their statements about the rights and requirements of people to self-government and security very freely in the past couple of months. Russia's attitude towards the general question of collaboration with Britain and the United States had been liberalised immensely and this had been reflected at the monetary conference.

No date has yet been fixed for the next meeting of the War Council. Members do not wish to meet again until
plans for manpower reallocation have reached a stage where they can be considered. Mr Curtin said he discussed the subject at length with Sir Thomas Blamey on Saturday.

31 July 1944

Curtin intimated that Turkey would take an important step this week in relation to the war but he did not indicate what it was. August 2 is the date fixed, presumably their time, but, Curtin continued, whether they will adhere to this remains to be seen. Certain other things had been arranged with Turkey before and she had not always kept to them. However, there was every reason to believe she would this time.

Apparently Von Papen had a change of mind as he was to have returned to Germany some days ago. However, he expressed a desire to remain in Turkey for the duration of the war and, to this, Turkey, after consultation with the Allies, agreed. However, information received this morning was that Von Papen had returned to Germany during the weekend.

Politically, Curtin added, any action taken by Turkey, would be important because the immediate effect would be that neither Bulgaria nor Romania would know where they were. Germany was still getting oil from Romania, but the quantity was not known. Some damage had been done to the Ploesti oilfields but the extent was not known. The loss of production would however be fairly extensive.

A censorship order will come out on 5 August covering the movements of Lord and Lady Gowrie, and the Governor of Victoria, Sir Winston Dugan, who will be acting Governor-General until the Duke arrives. Gowrie and his wife are leaving this weekend on a troopship.

Curtin continued: 'You can expect some important operations in the north as the pattern has been developing during recent days. I cannot say when, but it will not be immediately. The measure of the attack will be gauged by the measure of resistance to be expected and this is being worked out.' Curtin added a hint about something from Darwin, but he did not give any further information.

160 Winston Joseph Dugan (1876-1951), Baron, Governor of Victoria, 1939-49.

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On the invasion of Normandy and Rommel’s illness, Curtin said he had no information about Rommel, but the Normandy operations were not going as the Allies had arranged in point of time, nor had they progressed as anticipated, as the Germans apparently planned to circumvent the bridgehead and prevent a breakthrough to the plains beyond Caen. They have swung a tremendous amount of material and men against the British and Canadian troops, but they realise that failure in this area will mean a breakthrough by the Allies and will open up the road to Paris.

Curtin said the Allies did not have as much material as the command would wish for the reason that we were still short of moving room for the equipment in the quantity required. Until he can enlarge the area we already hold we will not be able to smash through. Reports filtering through from Germany indicate that German morale is bad but this did not indicate an immediate cracking. The uneasiness in Germany appears to permeate all classes.

Curtin was angry about Fadden’s complaints in Mackay about telephone tapping. He said that neither Fadden nor Menzies could have any complaint in that direction as it was specifically laid down that their phones were to be exempt.

1 August 1944 Polish home army starts open fighting in Warsaw
5 August 1944 Japanese Prisoners of war attempt mass breakout from a compound at Cowra, New South Wales

7 August 1944

Curtin said he did not feel disposed to comment very fully on some of the references made by Churchill in his speech last week. Actually he had warned Churchill in Britain that the Pacific war might finish earlier than had been contemplated.

Curtin said the statement put out about the unopposed landing at Amsterdam in the Pacific was ‘what I regard as the most brilliant piece of war propaganda since the war began’. He believes the statement would leave Japan guessing. It meant to them that certain of their important bases had been bypassed. They were probably in a quandary now as to whether to build up their Philippines
forces and risk not being able to get them out again or build up their forces to defend Formosa which they feared might be directly attacked. In plain language the enemy seemed to be 'in the cart'.

Later Curtin, when talking about the referendum, said: 'If you ask me what is wrong with the anti-Labor forces, it is that they're in a state of funk. They're thoroughly frightened. This is shown by their attitude to the referendum. When the convention was held and the Commonwealth parliamentary strengths were more even, they agreed that the Commonwealth Government needed more power. Now they say it isn't necessary. Funk, I think, is the reason.'

Curtin was asked about the effect of the termination of the war on the wool agreement with Great Britain. He said: 'The Menzies government made an agreement with the British Government that it should take the government wool clip and for the duration of the war. Mr Justice Owen,161 the Chairman of the Australian Wool Board, was in England last year, engaged in discussions with Mr Shackleton162 representing the British side of the agreement. Mr Justice Owen came back to Australia in a panic because Mr Shackleton had told him the agreement would run out when Hitler was defeated. At that stage it looked as if the war in the Pacific might well go on for some time after the European war had ended. Thus, the Australian wool clip would have been in a parlous predicament in respect of marketing. The matter was put up to me in a secret memorandum supported by the views of the Attorney-General's Department, and I was directed to clear the matter up during my visit to the United Kingdom. I cleared it up by disregarding the legal authorities in this country and the United Kingdom and having a heart-to-heart talk with Mr Churchill and with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. On the political level we exchanged letters to the effect that the agreement was to be regarded as current while either Britain or Australia was at war with any of the King's enemies. Of course, that still leaves this point to be cleared up—supposing the war ends in March or April, does the agreement apply to the wool clip of September-October of the same year? But the important thing is that the wool agreement continues in force as long as the war against Japan goes on, and when

161 William Francis Owen (1896-1972), Justice, Supreme Court of New South Wales, 1937-61 (and later of the High Court of Australia), Chairman, Central Wool Committee, 1942-45.
162 Sir Harry Shackleton (1878-1958), United Kingdom Wool Controller, 1939-49.
we make an amicable decision about the end of the war
the agreement will end.'

Curtin went on: 'I think it is utter nonsense that the
formal ratification of the peace conference should be
looked on as the end of the war. I think the war ceases
when the last shot has been fired and soldiers are no
longer fighting. I cannot envisage conditions for an
armistice with enemy countries as happened in the last
war. We have to destroy their armies and navies. The war
will go on until it reaches a stage when the enemy is
incapable of fighting any longer. That is a physical thing.
I don’t think enemy countries should take part in the
peace conference. People who think there will be an
armistice like there was last time are merely living in the
past. But to get back to the peace conference, I think it
should be confined to the victors who will discuss and
draw up plans for future world security.'

9 August 1944

As ked if it were true that Mr Essington Lewis had
recommended to the government that Mr McVey
should be allowed to concentrate all his energies on
aircraft production, Mr Curtin replied: 'Mr McVey is
Director-General of Civil Aviation, Director-General of
Postal Services and Secretary of the Aircraft Production
Department.' He added that Mr McVey's services had
been used by the government at important conferences
overseas, that Mr McVey would be interested in policy
matters and that a Deputy Director of Civil Aviation would
be appointed to deal with routine matters.

Mr Curtin went on to say that there was no country that
had done more than Australia to get an agreement on civil
aviation. We had done everything about policy preparations.
The trouble was that airline companies wanted to get the
best routes for themselves and leave all the other routes to
the government. But the outback areas had to be considered.
Of the three major Australian airlines, Qantas had done the
most to open up the country but had fared worst financially.
The position was that airlines had to take the fat with the
lean. They could not be expected to be granted routes from
one capital city to another. A merger of all Australian airlines
had been discussed but the matter had been delayed because the overseas lines which came here or wanted to come here were not united. As matters stood at present, no Empire air scheme was possible because Canada did not want to be a party to it. Similarly, no international air scheme was possible because Russia and America did not want to be parties to it. America did not have a policy at all except that she wanted certain landing rights so that American aircraft could land at Sydney. In return, she would allow Australian planes to land at Honolulu, although she would not let them go on to America.

Mr Curtin then criticised Mr Norman Brierley's recent attack on the Air Force and civil air administration. He recalled that Brierley, when running Australian National Airways, and a Perth auctioneer named Charles had run a racket by sending catalogues by air to step up subsidy payments. He added: 'I'll table the whole file on the matter if Brierley wants it.'

Mr Curtin also pointed out that some overseas concerns had interests in some Australian airlines. He added that if we could build Lancasters here there was no earthly reason why we should not build Yorks.

Curtin said he had told Abbott MP about his wool agreement talks with Mr Churchill and the Chancellor of the Exchequer adding: 'I told Joe that if he asked embarrassing questions on this matter in Parliament for the sake of political capital I'd punch him on the bloody nose.'

Greatest Offensive of All Time

'We must now concert our plans for settling the hash of our enemies.'

'What, the Germans and the Japs?'

'No, the airlines and the banks.'

Cartoon by Ted Scorfield

Bulletin, 24 January 1945

163 Australian National Airways was the main domestic airline, established in 1936, taking the name of an earlier company which had failed.

Asked about the intentions of the Australian Government in appointing a Minister to France, Curtin said France had no government and therefore it had no one responsible for appointing Ministers Plenipotentiary. Australian recognition of a Free French delegate at ministerial level was done mainly to please the Free French.

Curtin said he had received a wire from the South Australian Premier, Mr Playford, complaining that 'derogatory remarks about the South Australian Government had been made in a background statement about uranium issued to the press of Australia by the Prime Minister in Canberra'. Harold Cox (Melbourne Herald) and E. Waterman (Sun Pictorial), who represent the Adelaide News and Advertiser respectively, said they had sent the information to their offices for information but had been informed there was no leakage. Curtin emphasised that he gave off-the-record information to political roundsmen for the guidance of offices. He took a serious view of the leakage, and if there were similar incidents in the future he would have to stop giving off-the-record information.

15 August 1944  Allied forces invade southern France

19 August 1944  Curtin government tries unsuccessfully to amend the Constitution to confer on the federal government power over all employment and unemployment matters up to five years after the end of the war.

21 August 1944

Mr Curtin said that during the past few days he had been giving attention to the diplomatic side of the war to ensure that there would be no doubt about Australia's views. Suggestions and submissions made were only tentative. The British Government wanted to know what was the state of mind rather than the views of the dominion governments. The crucial question was whether Germany should be dismembered or disarmed. One of the arguments in favour of dismemberment was that certain parts of the Reich might support Britain in the event of Russia becoming a bit too acquisitive. The case
against it was that certain of the elements adjacent to Russia might fall into Russian influence very strongly.

Curtin said his own mind frankly favoured disarmament on the general ground that partitioning people was itself a prolific source of discontent and unruliness, leaving a constant state of combustion. He favoured a plan drawn on some basis of national realism with aggressors deprived of the resources to act. He thought it important to the world and particularly to Britain, in order not to leave her with a post-war legacy that no one could measure, that France and Germany should have something in the way of a national homogeneity in which their peoples might be given a hope of dealing with their internal economic and social problems so these would not constitute a perpetual ulcer in the heart of Europe.

He was not applying that argument to Japan at this stage.

In reply to questions Mr Curtin said he did not know the Russian view respecting Germany. He thought a recent statement in the news that Britain and the United States favoured dismemberment and Russia disarmament was guesswork. For all he knew there might be divided opinions in the British Cabinet on the subject. The Argentine had been a bother as between Britain and the United States. Britain wanted to see some of the Argentine views met, particularly as there was a residue of British foreign investment in that country.

In reference to President Roosevelt's desire for cooperation in making Pacific bases available, Mr Curtin said this had not been the subject of any approach by the United States Government. He had had tentative discussions on the question with Roosevelt and Churchill while abroad. He said he had no objection to anything the United States did north of the equator provided it did not trespass on British possessions in Hong Kong, Singapore or Malaya.

Referring to the Philippines, Curtin said: 'You can see the attack developing. It is not far away.' He added that Amboina was being dealt with too. The idea was to make the airstrips useless as protecting screens and to ensure that we would have less difficulty in moving in ourselves if we should find it necessary to put air power on them to shorten the range. This would also help to clear the waters for the movements of transports and so on.
In addition to a short statement for publication, Mr Curtin made the following off-the-record reference to manpower releases from the services: 'The manpower question has been settled as between the services and myself. The services know what the strength is and are making their dispositions accordingly. I have found that the operating power of the Air Force is at its peak and think that it has a base too wide to warrant that peak. The reassessment that is being made will not impair the striking strength. So many planes are not needed now as formerly for surveillance work over certain areas of the sea. No reduction has been made in the Navy.'

Curtin said all the escapees from the Cowra prisoner-of-war camp had been accounted for. For the time being no statement would be made for publication. The protecting power had to make an investigation to ensure that the Australian version was correct. He was quite certain it was. He very much doubted the wisdom of making any statement because of the dangers of reprisals against Australian prisoners in Jap hands.

165 On 5 August 1944, in the early hours of the morning, about 1100 Japanese prisoners of war, armed with baseball bats and improvised weapons, attempted to break out of their camp at Cowra, New South Wales. About 400 succeeded but all were recaptured or killed.

23 August 1944 Romania surrenders to the USSR
24 August 1944 Paris is liberated
25 August 1944 Romania declares war on Germany
2 September 1944 Allied forces enter Belgium
4 September 1944 Finland signs armistice with the USSR
8 September 1944 Soviet troops enter Bulgaria
17 September 1944 Allied forces land in Holland, Soviet troops begin offensive in Estonia

20 September 1944

Curtin said today he had had from Churchill a complete account of the Quebec conference. The decision of the conference brought down to definite shape Allied participation in the defeat of Japan. They also cleaned up a number of matters regarding the war in Europe including the retention of forces in the Mediterranean. The despatches from Churchill contained a good deal of detail. Curtin said he had shown them to Menzies and
Fadden. It was decided there should be no disclosure to the Opposition or government members generally.

The policy of unconditional surrender is still uppermost. The plans involve the surrender of defeated armies leaving the enemy to 'take their medicine'. Curtin said the Allies would have problems on how to use their armies. There had been a great deal of improvement in the development of policy by Foreign Affairs Departments of the Allies.

Curtin said opinion appeared to be hardening against dismemberment of Germany. He would not elaborate on this point. He said mixed Allied military commissions would administer the plans of the Allies in occupied countries. There were bound to be military forces also or the civil administrators might be liable to assassination.

Curtin said: 'I go home tonight more relieved than I have been since the war commenced.'

One idea worked out at Quebec was to establish a direct sea lane to China. This involves the clearing out of the Japs in Burma and areas adjacent.

A target date had been set for the defeat of Japan but Curtin refused to say what it was. He said jokingly that it ought to be a month before the next election was due, then added seriously: 'It could easily be that too.' The time which it was estimated would be necessary to defeat Japan was, Curtin said, much shorter than earlier estimates.

In discussing migration, Curtin said the British Government is at the moment opposed to the migration of orphans. He had sent a cable to the British Government asking for its views. The real problem of migration is that the countries from which migrants are wanted are at war. Another problem was transport.

Australia has had requests from the Netherlands East Indies for the supply of large quantities of food for use when the country is liberated. Curtin said that if it meant that feeding the native population of the NEI meant that Australians had to go without, he would 'have another think' about it.

He was a bit concerned about the operation of the United Nations Relief Administration as a rival organisation to the Ministries of Transport and War Organisation. Curtin's view was to 'let the big boys'
do more about UNRA's requirements. Our duties were towards China, India and the NEI, and to the establishment of our own people in New Guinea.

4 October 1944

Curtin is angry with Lazzarini over his pamphlet on banking policy. He said: 'I wish some of these architects of the New Order would shut up. There is a loan on. A man who cannot see the difference between banking policy in this war and the last is the man who is unable to see the difference between 6 per cent and 3 1/4 per cent.'

The Soviet is behaving 'particularly badly' in Curtin's words. Things have come to a head as a result of Soviet action in Bulgaria in forcing British and United States officials to leave on pain of imprisonment and without reference to the United Kingdom or the United States. It was not known yet whether the instruction was issued by a local commander or whether it came from Moscow.

Talking of the coming offensive in the Pacific, Curtin said an effort was being made to create very large supplies as far forward as possible so as to minimise the air cover that would be needed when operations actually started. A vast amount of labour was involved in the work of building up supplies. The problem in the Pacific was going to be much more complicated than that of maintaining supplies to Europe. Hospital accommodation and supplies were a major part of the problem.

6 October 1944

The Duke of Gloucester is due in Sydney on 1 January. He will proceed immediately to Canberra and will be sworn in on 2 January. A session of Parliament will be called as soon as possible afterwards—some time in January—and there will be a second session in May. The Duke will formally open the first session.

Curtin says, according to his information, the war in Europe is moving fairly slowly. It is necessary for our
forces to carry out considerable demolition of German installations and to carry out a great deal of reconstruction. It is also necessary for them to clear out pockets of German troops operating robot launching sites and other installations. Curtin said: ‘The war in Europe is not going to go as fast as some people imagined.’ He regretted General Montgomery’s promise that November would see the end of the war. He thought a politician could make such predictions but a soldier could not make such promises to other soldiers.

The King has approved of the appointment of Sir Frederick Eggleston as Minister to Washington, and the Australian Government is now awaiting Roosevelt’s approval before formally announcing the appointment.

9 October 1944 Churchill and Stalin hold talks in Moscow
11 October 1944 United States fleet attacks Luzon, the Philippines
23-26 October 1944 Naval battle of Leyte Gulf, the Philippines
1 November 1944 Liberation of Greece is completed
5 November 1944 Prime Minister Curtin suffers a coronary occlusion and is confined to a Melbourne hospital for two months; Allied planes bomb Singapore
24 November 1944 Tokyo bombed by planes based in the Marianas

13 December 1944

Forde denied a Daily Telegraph report that he had said £10 million a year must be spent on defence after the war. What he had said was that many millions would have to be spent. He thought privately that £50 million would be an absolute minimum.

Questioned regarding the possibility of British soldiers coming here, Forde said that until the war in Europe was over he did not think Australia could hope to get any British soldiers. He was disappointed that Sydney afternoon papers did not play up the arrival of the British fleet. He contrasted this with the display which greeted the arrival of the Americans and he said that in its way the latest development was as important. The fleet was here at the request of the Australian Government.
He revealed that last September the Prime Minister had informed the coal miners' leaders that the fleet was coming and that it was therefore necessary to increase coal production. Forde said some coal leaders had telephoned representatives of the government deploring the stoppages and pointing out the adverse effect on British opinion which loss of coal production would have after the arrival of the fleet. Forde said it would be base ingratitude after asking for British help if we did not recognise it.

The Duke of Gloucester is due in Sydney on 29 January. He will leave immediately for Canberra arriving there for the official welcome on 30 January.

30 December 1944  Hungary declares war on Germany
3 January 1945  Allied forces occupy Akyab, Burma
9 January 1945  United States forces land in Luzon

16 January 1945

In connection with his statement criticising Army Public Relations (APR) handling of the release of news of recent Australian operations, Calwell said the Department of Information was not able to take photographs during these operations, let alone have an ordinary reporter or observer present. Rasmussen put in military history photographers.

Calwell said there had been a move on to get everybody in the operational area into a uniform subject to military discipline. The Department of Information had successfully resisted this.

Calwell said Rasmussen was doing everything he could to build up APR. He was trying to build up a big department. Army Public Relations did not want anybody present at the recent operations. That was why the Department of Information and the press were not represented.

Angel, the Department of Information man in the north, had sent down a memorandum to Bonney protesting against the unreasonable censorship of the military authorities. He said newspaper correspondents had also sent protests to their own offices against the harsh treatment they were receiving.

166 Brigadier J.H. Rasmussen (1902–52), Director, Army Public Relations, 1941–45.
167 Don Angel (1911–90), journalist, Department of Information, 1942–45, in New Guinea and Pacific islands.
Calwell said APR had taken a suite of rooms in Sydney for the preparation of the script for the 'Army Hour', an ABC broadcast. Twenty-five officers and staff were employed writing the script, when only one or two men were necessary. All this was being paid for out of canteen funds.

Calwell referred to the censorship row last year and he said he had no part in the early incidents which led up to the trouble. The Army issued the famous statement about the withdrawal of 90,000 men from the Army. No attempt was made to inform the Department of Information so that an explanatory statement could be issued to the New York office.

Calwell said the cause of the trouble was the Defence Secretary and the Army allowing the war to be run by the brass hats.

Mid-January 1945

Forde disclosed today that Australian Army personnel had taken over the Solomons base from the Americans. The Australians were engaged in cleaning up. It was estimated that there were between 15,000 and 20,000 Japs still in this area, but they were 'dying on the vine'. Australians were probing them now and then.

Forde declined to comment for publication on the return of the miners to work. He said he was pleased to see that they had obeyed the government's order. After every Christmas there were absences in the coal industry and he did not want to condone this but in view of the fact that the majority of the miners obeyed, he did not want to be too tough. Also he did not want to praise those miners who had returned.

Government House is concerned over frequent references that are made to the 'Duke's Session', some of which make it plain that the Duke is not far away. Government House has officially taken up the matter with the Prime Minister's Department. Forde has decided not to issue a direct censorship but he has asked the State censors to have a conference with editors on the matter so that items on the subject may be examined before they are published. It is not intended that this examination should be made by State censors but by the newspapers themselves.
22 January 1945

Discussing the policy of nationalisation of airlines at his first press conference since his illness, Curtin said: 'I am not going to permit American interests to get a grasp on companies professing to be Australian—companies which recently were within an ace of not being Australian. Only the other day a merger was proposed and the company was offered in perpetuity 10 per cent on its paid-up capital. The shareholders would have been given a return equal to 10 per cent of their paid-up capital. You can be quite sure big business is behind that, and it was not Australian business.'

Curtin then went on to talk for 'background' purposes on the subject of airlines. He said Canada had had the business of external companies seeking control and he was not going to surrender to them here. His personal study gave him a knowledge that a considerable part of the Japanese shipping the Allies had been called upon to destroy had been acquired by purchase from countries with the Allies. Airway corporations were quite entitled to sell their planes when they wanted to, but he was not going to have repeated here the disposals policy of private monopolies of aircraft which had marked the mercantile marine of the world. Many ships formerly on the Australian register were now carrying munitions and war materials for the Japs. The number of coastal ships in 1938 was relatively less than in 1911. What happened with ships was what happened with newspapers and with banks in various parts of the world. He was a supporter of what the government intended to do. All those forms which in the past had developed the country and which in war could easily become of great service to the enemy should be continued for the benefit of the country.

After approving MacArthur's reticence on the Australian operations in the islands, Curtin said: 'It is not so long ago that there was solid criticism of the Australian government
because Australian forces were constantly fighting and were not being given any relief, so I was concerned to give them some kind of relief.'

When the advance against the Philippines was planned, Mr Curtin said the part the Australian forces were to play was agreed upon. To have given information as to the exchange of units and transfers which were being made would in the opinion of the government and the Commander-in-Chief have given to the enemy ultimately information it was desired to withhold from them. The two things most vital for the carrying out of the plans were the element of time and the desirability if it could be attained of establishing footholds in islands where the enemy would not expect to find Allied forces. The character of the forces would therefore be illuminating as to the general plans.

Mr Curtin recalled that there were submarines off the coast and in the Bismarck Sea and Torres Strait. The submarines had tried to deal with the direct route from the United States to Leyte and Hollandia and information could not be revealed.

22 January 1945  Burma Road is reopened

26 January 1945

At the War Council meeting yesterday General Northcott explained why it would be most detrimental to the carrying out of the plan of campaign at Luzon if particulars had been given earlier than they were regarding the exchange of American and Australian forces in the Solomons and New Guinea. Curtin said the truth was the number of men taken out of the Solomons and sent to the Philippines was much greater than the number of Australians who were put back. The waters between New Guinea and the Philippines were being patrolled by enemy submarines.

Curtin said newspaper reports, which had fortunately been incorrect, of operational matters had been available in Tokyo three to five days later. Efforts were being made to discover how Tokyo could get reports so quickly. It was suggested to Curtin that ordinary broadcasts were to
blame and he said this might be so, but that some of the newspaper reports, military intelligence had discovered, were being received in Tokyo.

Curtin said the Army had held the view that any disclosure earlier that Australians were going in exchange for Americans would have been of great value to the enemy in that he would have been able to reckon up the time it would take to dispose them and also could guess the point of attack.

Curtin revealed 100,000 men had gone into Luzon and it had taken 600 ships to transport them and their material. Until the operation was complete the full story could not be told. Capture of Manila would give the Allies an operational port and a harbour right in the middle of the Japanese empire. Winning Manila would be practically equal to the recovery of Singapore in strategical value. The whole of the British fleet could not be used until it had a harbour to go into. Curtin said afterwards it might be necessary to go into Manila to get rubber supplies to enable the war to be carried on at full pressure.

The Australian Navy and Air Force had been prominent in all recent operations. HMAS Australia had been hit on four occasions. Some of the damage was caused by Jap suicide bombers. However despite the damage, she had gone in to bombard her objective. After being hit she signalled that her speed had been reduced to $12\frac{1}{2}$ knots but a quarter of an hour later as a result of miraculous work in the engine room the speed had been increased to 22 knots. The corvette Arunta had also been hit.

Curtin said he believed that in about a fortnight or three weeks all forces will have reached a stage where it will be possible to say a lot more about what they have been doing. As a matter of fact the Navy had a big story 'on ice' awaiting an appropriate release time.

Curtin said the shipping problem was serious. A lot of ships were needed to transport men and equipment.

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27 January 1945  Soviet Red Army occupies Lithuania

30 January 1945  Duke of Gloucester, the King's brother, became Australia's Governor-General

4-11 February 1945  Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin meet at Yalta conference in the Crimea
15 February 1945 United States forces land in Bataan

8 March 1945 Admiral Nimitz announces that, since the war began, Japan has lost half of her battleships and three-quarters of her destroyers

12 March 1945 Australian troops land on the north coast of Bougainville

21 March 1945 British forces take Mandalay

1 April 1945 United States forces land on Okinawa

5 April 1945 USSR cancels its 1941 neutrality pact with Japan

8–13 April 1945 Soviet Red Army captures Vienna

12 April 1945 Death of President Roosevelt; Harry S. Truman becomes President of the United States

21 April 1945 Soviet forces enter Berlin

28 April 1945 Mussolini is shot by partisans in Italy

30 April 1945 Hitler commits suicide in Berlin; Prime Minister Curtin is admitted to hospital where he stays for several weeks suffering with congested lungs

1 May 1945 Australian troops land on Tarakan Island, off Borneo

7 May 1945 Germany surrenders unconditionally to Allied forces

8 May 1945 VE-Day (Victory in Europe)—all offensive action in Europe ceases

12 May 1945 Wewak is captured by Australian 6th Division

1–30 June 1945 During June 6,500 sorties by Allied planes dropped over 42,000 tons of bombs on Japan

20 June 1945 Australian troops land on Sarawak

26 June 1945 United Nations Charter is signed at San Francisco

1 July 1945 Australian troops land in Dutch Borneo

5 July 1945 Death in Canberra of Prime Minister John Curtin; MacArthur announces liberation of the Philippines

13 July 1945 J.B. Chifley elected leader of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party and becomes Prime Minister

16 July 1945 Conference in Potsdam, Germany, is attended by representatives from the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union, to draw up terms for Japanese surrender

26 July 1945 Clement Attlee elected Prime Minister of Great Britain

6 August 1945 First atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima

8 August 1945 USSR declares war on Japan
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By the end of the war Australia had been bombed 62 times. A total of 993,000 served in the various branches of the armed forces, 27,073 died or were killed in action, 23,477 were wounded, 22,376 were made prisoners in the war against Japan, of whom 8,031 died, and 8,184 were made prisoners in the war against Germany, of whom 265 died.
The cartoonists of the Second World War showed a wide range of quality in their drawing skills. As far as captions go, it is generally recognised that the notion of an independent cartoonist had not yet emerged. Themes and treatments came out of editorial conferences. Newspaper proprietors kept a firm hand on their leader writers and cartoonists—of course, to be a proprietor, almost by definition, was to be anti-Labor, even though in 1943 the *Sydney Morning Herald* found itself able to break ranks and support the re-election of the Labor government. The success of Curtin’s relations with the media was reflected in the fact that the mainstream cartoonists, while often critical, were broadly supportive of a united war effort.

Outside the mainstream, and peripheral in terms of its circulation at that time, the *Bulletin*—its publication only able to be continued because of the profits of the owners’ cheaply produced women’s magazine—had no such qualms about the need for a national consensus, even in the darkest days. Norman Lindsay, his style unchanged for decades, and his associate Ted Scorfield, probably the best draughtsman of the period, allowed their prejudices to stereotype Curtin, often showing him as a tremulous supplicant kowtowing to monkey-faced union bosses. A middle-aged man, with old-fashioned glasses, thinning hair and always in a dark suit is hard to portray as a leader. No one could make Curtin look like a man about to burst into *Giovenezza* as Scorfield’s soldiers—depicted as stout Anglo diggers—appeared to be about to do. Even George Finey, the most pro-Labor of the cartoonists, had difficulty. The truth is that, even before television, the images that politicians projected were inevitably partly formed by their God-given lineaments. Something of the lingering notion that Curtin was wimpish stems from the fact that he wasn’t a heroic subject for cartoonists.

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**Editors’ note**

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The popular image of Prime Minister John Curtin as a solitary figure treading the grounds of The Lodge in Canberra, fatigued but unable to sleep, racked with anguish about the lives of Australian soldiers, has been indelibly imprinted in the minds of Australians who lived through the Second World War.

While the stories were true enough, that image tended to cloud the public perception of Curtin, detracting from qualities of toughness and durability, and creating the erroneous impression of a man struggling with illness and crushed by the burdens of wartime leadership. On the contrary, Backroom Briefings shows a Prime Minister acute in analysis, vigorous in language and confident of his decisions—a unique insight into the qualities and style of a man whose political career and prime ministership have, until now, been poorly documented.

In his off-the-record briefings to senior journalists, Curtin emerges as being in command, not afraid to express strong opinions—he describes his own Labour Minister, Eddie Ward, as a 'bloody ratbag' and Sydney's Daily Telegraph as a 'nitwit' newspaper. At the end of 1942 Curtin comments tartly that, to Winston Churchill, Australia is the 'forgotten land'!

Backroom Briefings reveals, with remarkable frankness, the secret exchanges between the Australian Government and allied governments—a firsthand account of the momentous decisions that shaped wartime Australia.

Published with the assistance of the Lloyd Ross Forum

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