

TOWNSVILLE DURING WORLD WAR II

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Shortly before midnight on Saturday, 25 July 1942, four Japanese raiders bombed Townsville.¹ Most people were in bed, but in Flinders Street there were still a few chattering groups - those who had earlier debouched from the Roxy Theatre and stayed in town for a cup of coffee and a toasted sandwich.² It was three nights before full moon, the entire city was bathed in bright moonlight, and only a few white clouds flecked the sky.³ At one of the armed forces' dances still in progress, someone at the door shouted 'Air Raid, the sirens are going', whereupon lights were extinguished and people exited from the hall, some to drive away unconcernedly in their cars, others to seek the safety of slit trenches.⁴ In Flinders Street, police and air-raid wardens directed pedestrians with quiet efficiency and within ten minutes the main street was deserted.⁵ From trenches and concrete "pill-box" shelters, Townsvilleans strained to hear the drone of approaching planes which seemed a long time coming. It wasn't until twenty minutes after the initial wailing of the sirens that searchlights finally picked up the planes through the "thin, feathery layer of scudding cloud".⁶ Inexplicably, the planes circled the town for more than half an hour, leisurely inspecting their targets, before making their bombing runs. Then there was "a swish, a swoosh, and a krunk krunk krunk; it was one shattering blast and the ground shook momentarily....

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1. Commonwealth Archives Office (Brisbane), BP/361, Item 5-2 (GHQ Communiques), 26/7/1942 [CAO, BP/361, 5-2].
 2. CAO, BP 257/1, Box 2 (Australian Broadcasting Commission, Queensland: Transcripts of Talks, Speeches, Broadcasts, etc., 1938-59) [BP 257/1, Box 2], 27/7/1942, p. 1.
 3. Commonwealth Records Series (Canberra), CRS A816, Item 49/301/217 (R.W. Voller to A.W. Welch, 28/7/1942: Report on Air Raid at Townsville) [CRS A816, 49/301/217].
 4. BP 257/1, Box 2, op.cit., p. 1.
 5. Loc. cit.
 6. Loc. cit.

The sound of the planes gradually died away and it was all over."⁷

Thus the residents of "Australia's only area with city status to be bombed by the Japs"⁸ experienced their first taste of front-line warfare. Two more raids followed within a week.⁹ No damage was done and no-one was hurt, but admittedly it was the ineptness of the Japanese bombardiers rather than the efficiency of Townsville's defence which was the main reason for the citizens' lucky escape. A month before the raids the General Officer Commanding (North Queensland Area), General Milford, had bluntly described air-raid precautions in the city as "frankly unsatisfactory": there were "no adequate lighting restrictions and the people are quite uneducated as to the position generally. The local press refuses ARP publicity matter for fear of creating a scare.... With the lack of organization, over-crowding and great fire risk from wooden buildings, a raid would certainly have the most serious consequ-

7. Ibid., p. 2. See also TDB, 27/7/1942, where, to Sergeant T.C. Goode, a member of the Garrison Battalion, it seemed that "there were three bombs which dropped", hissing and exploding in "one long blast." Cf. CRS A816, 49/301/217, op. cit., where the Camoufleur-in-Charge, North Queensland Area, reported that the bombs "dropped some distance to the east of the wharves and landed in the sea" - actually, in the tidal flats near the old Power House and the mouth of the Ross River.
8. See L.A. Watson, The Townsville Story, op. cit., p. 28, whose account of the first raid tallies with official sources. However, the dates given by this writer for the second and third raids are inaccurate. Cf. also Austin Donnelly, The Port of Townsville: The Townsville Harbour Board (Sydney, 1959), esp. Chapter XIX, pp. 144-149, who reports the dates accurately but not the size of the attacking force. There were three raids altogether: the first on Saturday night-Sunday morning, 25-26 July, the second at about 2 a.m. on the morning of Tuesday, 28 July, and the third "just after midnight" the following night, i.e., on Wednesday, 29 July (see CAO, BP/361, 5-2, op. cit.). The Bulletin was inexact when it described the third raid as taking place "late on Tuesday evening" (see TDB, 27/7/1942; 29/7/1942; 30/7/1942; and cf. NQR, 1/8/1942).
9. See above fn. 8. The second and third raids were carried out by single flying boats (see CAO, BP/361, 5-2, op. cit.). On the second occasion bombs were dropped near the Animal Health Station at Oonoonba, on the outskirts of the city, "harmlessly" lopping some palm trees. On the third occasion, the raider was intercepted by allied fighters and jettisoned its bombs in the sea near Cape Pallarenda; after being "hit repeatedly" it was "last seen losing height and [was] believed to have been destroyed" (CAO, BP/361, 5-2, op. cit.).

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uences for which the Army will not escape a share of responsibility."¹⁰

The first raiders, despite their taunting presence over the city of at least thirty-five minutes, went completely unchallenged except for some sporadic machine-gun fire which, however, was "apparently a mistake."¹¹ The second raid, at least according to the local newspaper, provoked "heavy opposition from the anti-aircraft defences", "skilful searchlight spotting" and "accurate fire" which must have caused the occupants of the "carrier of death and destruction a certain jolt"; but since Townsville's anti-aircraft defences as late as May 1942 consisted of no more than one heavy battery of eight guns,¹² the "jolt" was very likely much less serious than journalistic enthusiasm allowed. More realistically, Townsville's Camoufleur-in-Charge pondered that at least army and civilian defence organizations had had "another excellent practice."¹³ Only the third raid met with the rather more determined resistance of a number of allied fighters which managed to get airborne before the Jap disappeared out to sea, and the pilot of one of the interceptors, a Captain John Mainwaring, thought that they might have made a kill "if only we had been a bit less excited."¹⁴ At least the dogfight provided some spectacular fireworks for the populace, "looking up from their cold slit trenches": "the course of the fighters' tracer bullets was plainly outlined, and when a hit was seen on the tail of the bomber groups of onlookers cheered the fighters. The tail actually caught fire, but for some reason it did not spread. The raider appeared to lose height temporarily, but then regained it, and the flying boat passed out of the range of the lights."¹⁵

One enthralled observer of the "guy fawkes display" was Tom Aikens who had been working a train to Townsville when it was flagged down at

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10. CRS A816, 49/301/217 (Report to Secretary, Department of the Army, 9/6/1942).
 11. CRS A816, 49/301/217 (Report on Air Raid at Townsville), op. cit.
 12. CRS A1608, AJ 27/1/1 (Prime Minister to Premier of Queensland, 15/5/1942).
 13. CRS A816, 49/301/217 (Report on Air Raid at Townsville), op. cit.
 14. TDB, 30/7/1942.
 15. Loc. cit.

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Oonoonba. Ordered into a slit trench by a local ARP warden, he objected that if he was going to be killed by a Japanese bomb he would go under while still "reasonably warm" and stayed where he was on the footplate of the engine.¹⁶ His attitude was not atypical of that all over the town. There was no panic; there was, on the contrary, an air of "eerie" unreality about the whole experience. Some took precautions "because you feel a little scared; but you can't do anything, so there is no need to panic: it's no use."¹⁷ Others remained in high spirits; there were even some who expressed disappointment when, on the first raid, "only one stick of bombs was dropped."¹⁸ Everywhere there was calm, patience and cheerfulness.¹⁹

Townsville's phlegm under fire was remarkable because the initial reaction of her citizens to the outbreak of war had bordered very close on panic. Soon after Pearl Harbour, blackout regulations were enforced and all radio stations from Townsville north were ordered off the air after sunset; finally, after the fall of Lae in March 1942, schools were closed down. A hurried exodus to the south began, and by the middle of 1942 Townsville had lost nearly one-quarter of her population - some 5,000-7,000 souls.²⁰ "People were scared stiff; you couldn't book a plane flight - not that there were many planes flying - you couldn't even make a trunk-line telephone call without first getting the permission of the military authorities. People just flocked away; they couldn't get on trains out of Townsville quick enough. They leased their homes for long periods - if they could find anyone to walk in and take a lease - or they just walked out and left their homes empty. Some simply gave their homes away."²¹

Mass flight from North Queensland was unquestionably encouraged by official unwillingness (or unpreparedness) to prevent it - indeed,

16. See Aikens Mem. (3), p. 117.

17. CAO, BP 257/1, Box 2, op. cit.

18. CRS A816, 49/301/217 (Report on Air Raid at Townsville), op. cit.

19. Loc. cit.

20. See CRS A816, 37/301/199 (Report on Civilian Morale in Queensland) [Report on Civilian Morale], unpaginated.

21. Aikens Mem. (3), p. 106.

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by the apparent readiness of Government to condone it. In February 1942, for example, local police and ARP wardens, acting under instructions from the State Police Commissioner, carried out a house to house door-knock in North Queensland towns to estimate the number of women and children who might have to be evacuated. Householders were told that they were at liberty then to evacuate their families to any part of Queensland, but that later on, if conditions deteriorated, they might be ordered to specific evacuation centres without themselves being permitted to exercise any option. When North Queenslanders were confronted on their very doorsteps with such evidence of official concern - indeed, of overt preparations to evacuate the North - it was scarcely surprising that dejection and consternation should have spread.²² Not that North Queenslanders were alone in reacting thus to the threat of invasion. On 2 January 1942 the Minister for Home Security (Mr. H.P. Lazzarini) had contrasted the behaviour of Singapore under siege with that of the much less accessible if not wholly untouchable Sydney: "Singapore remained calm, there was no sign of panic and every man and woman was ready to fight; while in Sydney everybody worried, hundreds were going away to the mountains and country evacuation areas. Are the people of Australia more interested in taking cover than in getting on with the job of winning the war?"²³

Australian leaders may have deplored the mass eagerness to decamp, but in fact at the root of incipient panic was the absence of leadership. Where the national government did not actually appear, as in North Queensland, to be actively preparing for evacuation, it gave the impression of vacillating indecision. Despite innumerable pleas for the explicit

22. CRS A1608, AD 39/1/3 (Acting Secretary, Department of Home Security to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department). The Secretary of the Ayr (North Queensland) Chamber of Commerce had sent a telegram to the Department of Home Security asking for an official explanation of government policy on evacuation.

23. CRS A1608, AD 39/1/3 (Minister for Home Security to Prime Minister, 2/1/1942).

definition of government policy on evacuation,²⁴ the fledgling Labor Government in Canberra floundered in a sea of uncertainty. On some occasions it gave the appearance of moving towards the final enunciation of a policy opposed to evacuation,²⁵ only later to compound public confusion by retreating to its former equivocal position. As late as July and August 1942, when so many thousands had already evacuated themselves, the government still remained silent. After the third Japanese raid on Townsville, the Mayor, J.S. Gill, vainly begged the Prime Minister to "utilize" his "influence" to preserve what was left of "normal life" in the city by preventing the wholesale evacuation which was "believed" to be "imminent."²⁶ The compulsory evacuation of Townsville would mean "the dislocation of all services now rendered by civilians to the whole population extending into the Gulf and the Northern Territory which was dependent on Townsville for its existence."²⁷

The main cause of official irresolution over the question of evacuation was that "urgent military need" seemed likely to require the sort of mass abandonment of homes that a government of civilians instinctively opposed. Military authorities in Townsville, for instance, wanted the evacuation of the city because the influx of soldiers had made the city "congested and overpopulated", and civilian life was "interfering with the military control."²⁸ As early as May 1942 the commander of the

24. See, for example, CRS A1608, AS 39/1/3 (Premier of Queensland to Prime Minister, 22/5/1942): "Shall be glad to have your views...if Townsville evacuation effected a general evacuation from the north would undoubtedly result."

25. One indication of a movement within the Curtin Government towards the formulation of a policy opposed to evacuation was contained in the Prime Minister's reply to a letter from the Deputy Premier of Queensland (F.A. Cooper) on 19 June 1942 in which Cooper drew attention to the vast stocks of non-perishable commodities that merchants and retailers were removing from "all vulnerable coastal areas" between Cairns and Rockhampton. Curtin advised that "no further stocks of supplies should be removed from coastal areas" (see CRS A1608, AD 39/1/3 [Deputy Premier of Queensland to Prime Minister, 19/6/1942; Prime Minister to Deputy Premier of Queensland, 18/7/1942]).

26. CRS A1608, AS 39/1/3 (Mayor of Townsville to Prime Minister, 30/7/1942).

27. Loc. cit. Similar telegrams were sent by the Townsville Chamber of Commerce and the North Queensland Employers' Association.

28. See CRS A1608, AS 39/1/3 (J. Hackett to A.W. Fadden, 31/7/1942).

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First Australian Army sought the compulsory evacuation from Townsville of "at least another 10,000 people" whom it was proposed to relocate in southern Queensland in the homes of people living between Southport and Redcliffe.²⁹ When the Army Minister, Frank Forde, visited Townsville early in 1942, he admitted to one local resident that "the prospect of an evacuation" arose from the "severe" pressure being exerted on the Federal Government by military authorities.³⁰ To civilians remaining in Townsville the threatened expulsion from their homes would be "a grave blunder, a serious injustice, even a tragedy."³¹ That evacuation did not in the end come about was not the result of any purposeful intervention by Government: the Commander-in-Chief merely decided that "the present strategical situation" for the time being did not justify evacuation and the Federal Government gratefully acquiesced.³²

Canberra did not finally formulate its policy on evacuation until September 1942 - seven months after its initial consideration at a conference of State Premiers on 4 February 1942 - by which time, of course, the flood tide of war had receded from Australian shores and most evacuees had returned to their homes. Wholesale evacuation was belatedly pronounced "not feasible" and "undesirable", both "in the interests of the people themselves and in the interests of the fighting forces."³³ The people could not be guaranteed adequate accommodation nor even "life's necessities" unless they remained in their homes; evacuation, moreover, could not be countenanced because of "the interference with the production of war equipment" which it would entail. Only the limited evacuation of young children "from areas contiguous

29. CRS A1608, AS 39/1/3 (Premier of Queensland to Prime Minister, 22/5/1942; and see another letter to Secretary, Department of the Army, 11/6/1942).

30. CRS A1608, AS 39/1/3 (J. Hackett to A.W. Fadden), op. cit.

31. Loc. cit.

32. CRS A1608, AS 39/1/3 (Secretary, Department of the Army to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 25/5/1942). See also ibid., Prime Minister to Premier of Queensland, 25/5/1942; and Army Minister to Commander-in-Chief, 27/5/1942. Cf. ibid., Prime Minister to Premier of Queensland, 25/7/1942.

33. CRS A1608, AD 39/1/3 (Prime Minister to Premiers of all States, 7/9/1942).

to likely targets for bombing or shelling" might take place, but even then "only when the occasion arises"; otherwise, the people had to be educated by propaganda to remain in their homes and to establish a force capable of checking the possible spread of panic. Australia's successful defence "presupposed" that the morale of the people would remain firm.³⁴

The spontaneous and voluntary evacuation of North Queensland immediately after Pearl Harbour was not the only indication that the "morale" of the people had in fact already plunged to a nadir of despondency that boded ill for the successful prosecution of a protracted war. There were hysterical outbursts against "aliens" - the settlers of Italian descent who formed such a large component of the regional population - who, whether "naturalized or unnaturalized", suddenly found themselves subjected to an organized campaign of vilification, denunciation and internment.

The ripples of hatred even reached Canberra where, on 19 June 1942, War Cabinet felt constrained to consider the "trouble" that had arisen in regard to the employment of Italians on the North Queensland canefields.³⁵ In Tully, north of Townsville, an "Empire Protestant Defence League" had been formed by a prominent member of the Protestant Labor Party, Ernest Henry Malin, to foment disaffection among employees in the sugar industry and specifically to counsel "Britishers" not to work alongside Italians.³⁶ Xenophobia took the form of concerted efforts by unionists to force Italian workers out of the sugar industry; Army Headquarters, Northern Command, expressed disquiet that "there was trouble in this direction everywhere."³⁷ Fortunately for the Italians, considerations of military security were found to clash with the persecution of aliens: such actions "endangered rather than assisted" the safety of the Commonwealth because they antagonized people "who would otherwise be at least neutral in their attitude, or, by depriving them of their occupations, make them particularly

34. Loc. cit.

35. See CRS A2671, 174/1940 (War Cabinet Minute No. 350, 19/6/1942).

36. See ibid., (Secretary, Department of Defence Co-ordination to Secretary, Department of the Army, 25/7/1940).

37. Loc. cit.

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susceptible to subversive influences."³⁸ On military advice, War Cabinet therefore decided that preference in employment should be granted to all British subjects (who might be either British born or naturalized),³⁹ though unnaturalized Italians would not be given employment to the exclusion of British subjects. Indeed, beyond expressing the pious hope "that our people will not deny friendly aliens the right of employment and the ordinary privileges of our social life", War Cabinet decided that nothing further need be done for the protection of friendly aliens.⁴⁰

On one occasion, Townsville's Deputy Mayor, Tom Aikens, convened a public meeting in the Theatre Royal in an attempt to discredit some of the "incredible" stories in circulation concerning the "disloyalty" of the Italian population. "I had two of Townsville's most prominent businessmen come to see me and complain that one fellow was out in Ross Creek in a rowing boat sending morse code messages to Japanese submarines off the coast. When I said 'Oh, really, has he got dry batteries; he must have some power to transmit', they merely stared at me blankly and replied 'He must have something: he's out there tapping away.'"⁴¹ By the time of the actual air raids on Townsville, vague accusations of "disloyalty" had burgeoned into positive allegations of active espionage: an official report on the second raid alluded to the prevalence of "rumours" that "flares and signal lights" had illuminated the raider's approach.⁴² To Aikens, the continuing internment of aliens and of naturalized British subjects "with an anti-British history" seemed "the most putrid scandal" associated with the war.⁴³

38. Loc. cit.

39. See ibid., (War Cabinet Minute No. 350, 19/6/1942).

40. Loc. cit., (War Cabinet Communique issued in Brisbane on 2 August 1940).

41. Aikens Mem. (3), p. 107.

42. See CRS A816, 49/301/217 (Report on Air Raid at Townsville, op. cit.

43. See Aikens Mem. (3), p. 123. There is scope for a most interesting study of the internment issue in North Queensland. Details of individual internments may be found in Department of the Army files held in the Commonwealth Archives Office, Brisbane (see CAO, BP/176, Series 3, Folio 28/1/42, 29/308/42 [Aliens Control]).

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Of course, General Milford's gloomy assessment of Townsville's defence capability early in June was hardly calculated to dissipate the jumpy suspicions and nervous anxiety of her citizens. At the beginning of 1942 Colonel Frank North, Aikens' sometime nemesis on the City Council,⁴⁴ commanded a "Garrison Battalion" consisting of a handful of regulars who manned rifle pits around the perimeter of Castle Hill. A Volunteer Defence Corps trained with jam tins full of sand and rifles made of wood. One story which swept the town faster than a guinea-grass fire told of the VDC sentry who timorously challenged a stranger approaching one of the defence installations: "Halt," he said, "give the pass word or I'll fill you full of bloody white ants."⁴⁵ There were indeed scant grounds for even sardonic optimism of this kind. When the Acting Secretary of the Department of Home Security, A.W. Welch, visited Townsville for five days (10-15 June 1942) to check on the accuracy of General Milford's reports, he could only confirm the GOC's worst fears. The twelve electrically operated sirens in the city were "insufficient"; there was no street lighting; provisions for fire-fighting were "inadequate"; the water supply was "strained"; the mobility of Air Raid Post Wardens was "doubtful" because of the shortage of tubes and tyres; the sewerage system was "vulnerable"; there was "no satisfactory response" to his inquiry "as to who would be responsible in the event of a raid for the co-ordination of civil defence services or for any special measures required"; there was "no arrangement for the essential services to be represented at the Control Room"; the Control Room itself, as set up in the Police Station, "did not appear adequate"; no authority in Townsville, not even the GOC himself, had the power to require a blackout; the press in Townsville was "not very helpful". Only the shelter facilities - fifteen of the pill-box type in the business part of the town, 147 four-man slit trenches in the main street, and some 50 twenty-man covered trenches in the various parks and along the bus routes - appeared "reasonably satisfactory."⁴⁶ On the occasion of the first

44. See above p.

45. Aikens Mem. (3), p. 107.

46. See CRS A816, 49/301/217 (Acting Secretary, Department of Home Security to Secretary, Department of Defence, 27/7/1942).

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raid, administrative chaos of the kind reported by Welch resulted in the harbour installations, undoubtedly the prime target of the Japanese attack, appearing to the incoming raiders as a fairyland of lights.

"Apparently some difficulty was experienced in ascertaining the location of the switches and determining who was responsible for the switching off of the lights. It is understood that finally the lights were either smashed or shot off by the American Army."⁴⁷

Indeed the "calm" pervading Townsville during the raids proved to be no more than a shocked lull in a continuing process of deteriorating morale which the preceding months had unfolded. In particular, Australian and American armed forces began to arrive in the city virtually from the moment the civilian exodus began, and, after a brief interlude of comfort and reassurance provided by the flexing of military muscle, a whole host of new problems created by military preponderance soon made Townsvilleans sigh for a return of the old and much less tangible fears of military under-presence. The military build-up lifted Townsville's population to an eventual peak of about 90,000 by the middle of 1943; soldiers outnumbered civilians by almost three to one.⁴⁸

The demands of the armed services coupled with a dearth of civilian manpower brought widespread inconvenience and embarrassment through the sudden disappearance of many basic commodities.⁴⁹ Such shortages, of course, were common to all nations at war and to the whole of Australia, but nowhere in Australia was the disparity in numbers between soldiers and civilians so great as in Townsville; the privations of her citizens were consequently more real.⁵⁰ Large

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47. CRS A816, 49/301/217 (from the report of a Chief Clerk, Department of Home Security to Secretary, Department of Home Security, 13/8/1942). This report followed a three-day visit (1-3 August 1942) to Townsville by its author in order to observe the effects of the raids.
48. See CRS A461, L356/5/2 (Secretary, Department of Labour and National Service to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 22/6/1944).
49. See above, Chapter 2.
50. This was not only in the opinion of Townsvilleans themselves. At a public meeting in Townsville in July 1944, one of the Federal Government's leading academic advisers, Professor Copeland, "admitted" that North Queensland had "suffered more disabilities during the war than probably any other part of the Commonwealth" (see CRS A816, 31/301/311 [Secretary, Townsville Chamber of Commerce to Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, 17/7/1944]).

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numbers of householders were completely deprived of supplies of ice and milk - the two "most serious" shortages;⁵¹ tinned and dried fruits, biscuits, alcohol, and especially fresh fruit and vegetables were scarce and exorbitantly expensive. All fruit and vegetables arriving in Townsville, usually from markets a thousand miles away in the south, were distributed either through local wholesalers or a military "Committee of Directions". The latter body attempted to indent all army requirements but frequently requisitioned from town wholesale merchants if military supplies fell short. There were no specific quota allocations to civilians nor indeed any military consideration of the townspeople's specific needs.⁵² Fruit became even more of a rarity than vegetables because of the individual purchases of soldiers in the town, with the result that "the ordinary householder and his children [were] forced to go without."⁵³ Profiteering was also rife. Early in 1943 watermelons fetched £1 each in Cairns and Townsville; tropical pineapples and pawpaws cost more than they did in Sydney.⁵⁴ Persistent shortages eventually tried the patience of Townsvilleans who became "fed up" with "the raw deal and shabby treatment extended to the people of this city."⁵⁵ When beer quotas not only failed to improve but actually fell after 1 August 1944 (from 81,512 to 76,120 gallons), the Townsville Trades and Labour Council contemplated, threatened and finally held a one day strike to call attention to the "unrest" among the people of Townsville.⁵⁶

51. See Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. See CAO, BP 18/2, CRC 30 (President, Townsville Trades and Labour Council to Chairman, Emergency Food Supply Committee, Townsville, 15/10/1944). This letter was prompted by continuing bread shortages, a short beer quota, the lack of ham, bacon, "dainties", lollies and chocolates. Earlier and subsequent correspondence referred to shortages of "biscuits, condensed milk, full cream milk, tinned fruit, pepper, macaroni, wax matches, household utensils, fencing wire and netting, starch, clothes pegs and millet brooms", and to the "pernicious practice" of "blackmarketing and back door selling at exorbitant rates."

56. Loc. cit. See also TDB, 6/12/1944 ("Townsville's One Day Strike").

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No preparations had been made for the accommodation of any considerable number of troops in Townsville and the military simply acquired, whether by official impressment or private treaty, large numbers of private homes as well as hotels, cinemas, public halls and schools.⁵⁷ Early in 1943, 177 private residences had been taken over.⁵⁸ Hotel accommodation was at a premium; parks and railway waiting rooms served as popular if uncomfortable alternatives. Manpower problems forced most of the remaining hotels to close their kitchens and dining rooms. The guest who had been fortunate enough to find a bed in one usually ended up at the tail of a long queue into a city cafe already packed with servicemen. Although the Comforts Fund and other canteens served men in uniform with excellent meals at 1/6d, many preferred to eat at a higher price in a city restaurant.⁵⁹ Twelve months later, when the military population had passed its peak, the housing situation still showed no improvement: 170 dwellings were occupied by the military.⁶⁰ By then, Townsville's shortage of housing, "serious" even before the arrival of the troops, had become "pressing" and "acute."⁶¹

The acquisition of premises by private treaty curiously provoked just as much citizen ire as peremptory impressment. Perhaps this was sometimes warranted, as when one incensed burgher wrote his member of Parliament: "I might say that during the past couple of days since the raids have been on, approaches are being made to people owning decent homes here, that they be leased to American officers with rental no

57. Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.

58. Ibid.

59. There was a similar situation in regard to milk bars where, to some observers, the presence of so many soldiers seemed "extraordinary". In the canteens a man in uniform could buy a milkshake "containing pasteurized milk" for 4d, whereas in cafes the price ranged from 6d to 2/-. "The most common price appears to be 9d or 1/-, depending on the country of origin of the soldier, the temper of the attendant, and the supply of milk" (ibid.).

60. Of these, 42 houses and 8 flats were occupied by Air Force personnel (see CRS A461, L356/5/2, op. cit.

61. Ibid. (Acting Premier of Queensland to Prime Minister, 15/2/1944; and Premier of Queensland to Acting Prime Minister, 8/5/1944). See also CRS A461, K356/5/2 (Housing, Queensland: Policy).

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object; and the statement is being made to the owners of these homes that it would be wise for them to take advantage of such offers, as plans are in hand by the Australian military authorities for the evacuation of Townsville and no rental return will be made for them...."⁶² For the most part, however, the opprobrium earned by the armed forces was not only unjustified but cynically bestowed: it was a "common habit" of property owners leasing premises "to represent to the citizens that they have been forced out of business" whereas in fact the army contracts had been voluntarily solicited, eagerly entered into and lucratively discharged.⁶³ For example, the owners of Townsville's architectural pride, the quaintly neo-Byzantine Queen's Hotel on the Strand, had their cake and ate it too. They agreed of their own free will to led the residential portion of the hotel to the U.S. forces at a rental of £50 per day, while still retaining the hotel's principal money-spinner, the bar trade.⁶⁴

The citizens' growing realization that with or without the armed forces Townsville was "in a sad way"⁶⁵ - the feeling of being caught between Scylla and Charybdis - was only strengthened by the strains which an exigent military placed on the city's public utilities. Water was the main problem: how to educate a huge transient population to the necessity of conserving a deficient and rigorously rationed supply?⁶⁶ The Townsville City Council became so concerned with wastage that it maintained inspection patrols on the large military encampments ringing the city such as that at Armstrong's Paddock.⁶⁷ "The soldiers, not being used to water restrictions, would clean their clothes by throwing them down on the floor and turning the showers on them; every shower would be turned on, with a heap of dirty clothes on the ablutions' floor."⁶⁸ Indeed, Townsville's water shortage was a problem of such sheer physical magnitude and public emotional entanglement that the full story of various City Council's efforts to

62. CRS A1608, AS 39/1/3 (J. Jackett to A.W. Fadden), op. cit.

63. Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.

64. Ibid.

65. CRS A1608, AS 39/1/3 (J. Hockett to A.W. Fadden), op. cit.

66. Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.

67. The site of today's James Cook University's Pimlico campus.

68. Aikens Mem. (3), p. 114.

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solve it was assuming the dimensions of a spellbinding saga.⁶⁹ Nor were commercial laundries any salve to the citizens' sartorial seaminess; soon after their arrival American troops took over the Townsville Steam Laundry, the only enterprise capable of handling large quantities of linen, and military priorities placed the civilian last. One hotel proprietor even feared that a military threat of refusal to accept his laundry was being used as a weapon to make him surrender all his accommodation to the forces.⁷⁰ But of all the public utilities which failed to function satisfactorily, at least from the citizens' point of view, none was more annoying or demoralizing than the practical impossibility of communicating or conversing by telephone. It was "no uncommon experience" for a telephone caller to wait up to half an hour before raising the exchange; one man watched his house burn to the ground while he vainly tried to ring the fire station from a neighbour's house."⁷¹

Unable to obtain many basic commodities; unable to phone his friends or even call for assistance in an emergency; unable to contact his relatives outside the city because of a military embargo on all civilian long-distance telephone calls;⁷² sequestered at night in his blacked-out home "whilst wharves and prisoner-of-war camps were brilliantly illuminated"; unable to visit his friends or go to the pictures after dark because of the "disorderly elements among the troops" who roamed the streets after nightfall "in hundreds";⁷³ unable to attend other entertainments because most of the seats were occupied by troops;⁷⁴ unable

69. See below, Chapter 5.

70. Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.

71. Ibid.

72. See CRS A816, 31/301/311 (Military Security, North Queensland). The embargo was partially lifted towards the end of 1944 when, under continuing pressure from civilians in North Queensland, the Australian Commander-in-Chief, General Blamey, decided that permission to make "urgent private calls and urgent business calls" should be granted "more freely." This resulted in "a large number of urgent private calls and genuine business calls being permitted from and to the area to which the restrictions apply, subject of course to monitoring" (see ibid. [Secretary, Department of the Army to Secretary, Department of Defence, 26/10/1944]).

73. Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.

74. Ibid.

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even to forget his misfortunes in the hotel bars which opened for only an hour or two before lunch - the Townsvillean could not help but give in to a rising sense of isolation, irritation and abandonment. Morale in fact plummeted so low that, in January 1943, the national government appointed two academic investigators, a physiologist and an anthropologist, to examine the causes and cures of civilian disaffection in North Queensland.⁷⁵ According to their report, it was "by no means certain" how the civilians would react to a protracted war effort, so "resentful" were they of their treatment. "Should their complaints remain unheard and their legitimate grievances unadjusted, they may well prove easy dupes for enemy propaganda. A refusal to co-operate with the Services could easily follow, together with opposition to any Government which aimed at continuing the war."⁷⁶ These were pretty dire apprehensions.

The pessimism, if not quite yet defeatism, of North Queenslanders, was attributable not merely to the material deprivations following in the wake of military occupation but also to the proliferation of unfamiliar social problems with which they increasingly felt unable to cope - prostitution, venereal disease, pugnacity and violence among the troops themselves, especially arising out of the real and imagined differences between Australian and American national traits. Indeed "the most serious source of civilian distrust" was brawling between Australian and American servicemen, leading to the citizens' taking sides with one side or the other, usually their own, or branding all servicemen as barbarians.⁷⁷

On the Australian side, the diggers' truculence towards Americans stemmed mainly from the pampered softness, even mounting to cowardice, with GIs supposedly exhibited, or from simple envy of his supposed sexual

75. See CRS A816, 37/301/199 (A.A. Conlon, Chairman, Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale, to Prime Minister, 1/4/1943; and encl., Report on Civilian Morale in North Queensland, by Professor R.D. Wright, Professor of Physiology in the University of Melbourne, and Dr. Ian Hogbin, Lecturer in Anthropology in the University of Sydney, pp. 15 (typewritten unpaginated) + appendices. The two academics visited North Queensland from 6 January to 26 January 1943.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

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prowess, his high pay, free spending and superior military appurtenances.⁷⁸ On the American side, "peevish GIs tended to magnify the discomforts of life in a new land; in their eagerness to spend their folding green, they invited the overcharge of waiters, landlords, florists and taxi-drivers, who called their profits 'Yankee cream'."⁷⁹ Veterans were not nearly so conspicuous in street fighting as those who had not yet faced the enemy. The men of Australia's Ninth Division, for example, long absent in the deserts of North Africa, returned to Australia "breathing fire and brimstone", convinced by German propaganda that the Yanks had stolen their wives and sweethearts.⁸⁰ When they landed in Sydney, American soldiers were instructed to keep to their quarters and the windows of the American Centre were boarded up; but not a single incident occurred.⁸¹ Similarly,

78. See D. Wecter, "The Aussie and the Yank", Atlantic Monthly, 177 (May 1946), pp. 52-56, in N. Harper, Australia and the United States (Melbourne, 1971), pp. 154-155. Cf. J.H. Moore, The American-Australian Alliance (Melbourne, 1970), p. 55. See also Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.: "The conduct of soldiers towards girls is another source of criticism. Civilians have very definite views on the behaviour proper between the sexes, and transgression is looked upon with disfavour. The very free association between the members of the American forces and so many of our girls gives rise, therefore, to adverse comment. The woman is usually absolved, blame being attributed to either the subtlety or the crudity of the American, depending on the inclination of the observer." See also CRS A1608, AS 39/1/3 (J. Hackett to A.W. Fadden), op. cit.: "It is comforting to have so many of the U.S.A. forces here, without them we would undoubtedly be in a sad way, but their manner of living is in very sharp contrast to the conditions under which our own military men are existing."

79. See D. Wecter, "The Aussie and the Yank", op. cit.: "High pay and free spending of our men yielded no more than the usual toll of inflation in civilian circles, envy in military ones. GIs with a grudge against overcharging...will readily endorse these sentiments of an expeditionary force member long ago: 'They fleece us piteously; the price of everything is exorbitant; in all dealings that we have with them they treat us more like enemies than friends.' These words were written in 1782 by Count Fersen, staff officer to Lafayette, after a winter among the Yankees. Curiously enough, the GIs reputation in Australia - that of a stalwart and efficient soldier, with too much money and a devastating way with the girls, is almost exactly that gained in 1915-19 by the Anzacs in England."

80. D. Wecter, "The Aussie and the Yank", op. cit.

81. Loc. cit.

diggers in transit through Townsville on their way home from New Guinea showed little inclination for argument. Whilst there was not much fraternization between Australian and American veterans, each was ready with "unsolicited testimonials for the heroism and fighting ability" of the other.⁸² On the other hand, many ugly encounters undoubtedly took place between rear-echelon troops - to Townsvillians, the holders of the "Flinders Street Star" - and it was these who tended to repeat the stories of American cowardice with greatest gusto.⁸³ Not even stifling censorship - occasionally of the sort of obscurantist intensity which led to the banning throughout Queensland of all broadcasts of Boccherini's Minuet and Vienne's Tick Tock Entr'acte⁸⁴ - could conceal from civilians the street "disturbances" which bore "an inter-allied aspect" and which showed neither side "in a very attractive light", but least of all the Australians.⁸⁵

If seasoned diggers on the whole treated stories of their loved ones' infidelity with the aloofness they usually deserved, their civilian counterparts were decidedly less inclined to forgive innumerable other instances of what seemed to them rampant immorality. In Townsville there was a "marked" increase in the incidence of venereal disease; it was also well known that the bordellos behind the Causeway Hotel were veritable mints for their resourceful entrepreneurs, one girl accumulating £3,800 in her savings' bank account over a period of twelve months.⁸⁶ What the evidence of their own eyes did not confirm, some citizens were prone to leave to the embellishment of a prurient imagination. The Officers' Club in the Seaview Hotel, notwithstanding a two-hour limit on its bar trading hours, was commonly believed to be little more than a brothel, the scene of

82. Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.

83. Ibid.

84. See CAO, BP/361, 1-1, 1-1A (State Publicity Censor: Instruction to Broadcasting Stations, 13/5/1942).

85. See ibid. (State Publicity Censor to Chief Publicity Censor, Canberra, 31/7/1943). Probably the most infamous of these "inter-allied disturbances" was the so-called "Battle of Creek Street" (November 1942) when Australians and Americans brawled outside the American canteen in Creek Street, Brisbane. For details of similar if lesser conflicts in Townsville, see Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.

86. Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.

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"drunken debauches" and "depraved orgies." On one occasion, so a popular story went, 43 girls were forcibly removed from officers' beds and left to cool off in the city gaol;⁸⁷ on another, an entire railway carriage filled with pregnant WAAAFs was supposed to have been surreptitiously sent south, with the legend 'Return when empty' scored in chalk on the side.⁸⁸ In fact, the only evidence of bacchanalian revelries at the Seaview consisted in the sounds of laughter and singing which emanated from the premises each night; and in the six or seven months spanning the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943 only one WAAAF had become pregnant.⁸⁹ Tom Aikens, with his unfailing instinct for sensing a mood, blowing it up into lifesize proportions, articulating it and thereby assisting it to coagulate, swore just as balefully that "soldiers were now pushing the girls whom they had impregnated under Army trucks to save themselves the expense of an illegal operation."⁹⁰ And that was precisely the point: the jumpiness of civilians, the exaggerated stories of military rambunctiousness and lawlessness, the gnawing fears and sporadic hysterical outbursts were symptoms rather than causes of a deep-seated community malaise.⁹¹

One other particularly unsettling source of civilian uneasiness was the presence of large numbers of American negro troops in and around Townsville. "What clearly impressed many Australians who saw the Negro was his magnificent physique...but [they also] saw him handling machinery, performing unusual tasks and at times working with or even directing the activities of whites."⁹² This had the effect of dislodging the citizens' stereotype of the black man as a primitive subhuman - irredeemably lazy, shiftless, dissolute, devoid of normal human motivations - and indeed

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid. See also D. Wecter, "The Aussie and the Yank", op. cit.

91. Cf. Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.: "We suggest that the eagerness with which charges are repeated may be an indication that they are more the excuse than the reason for irritation."

92. See J.H. Moore, "Australians learn to live with big black bucks", The Sunday Review (Melbourne), 13 June 1971, pp. 1022-23.

the shock to Australians of the arrival of Negroes on their shores was plainly schizophrenic. On the one hand, some residents of North Queensland were prepared to accept him for what he was, though admittedly with condescending surprise: "I like some of the black Americans. The negroes, those I have met further inland, seemed real people."⁹³ On the other hand, Australian officialdom agreed "reluctantly to accept negro soldiers, and then only on the condition that they would be withdrawn "at the end of the Australian emergency."⁹⁴ When one Federal Minister heard that negro troops were actually being permitted to patronize brothels in Brisbane and Townsville, and that the prostitutes were white Australian girls, he recoiled in horror at the thought: "This seems to me to be something so outrageous to Australian psychology that it is likely to become the gravest possible menace to Australia's war effort.... Perhaps nothing embittered the German people more and provided such a fertile field of exploitation by Hitler in the early days of the rise of National Socialism, than the compelling of the German people to provide white German woman to satisfy the lust of American Negroes."⁹⁵ In deference to such sensitivities, the American Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Theatre, General MacArthur, advised the Australian Government that he "respected" Australia's racial views and would assign Negroes to "bases far from urban centres."⁹⁶

Townsville, of course, was just such a base "far from urban centres", and most of the early arrivals of American troops in the city were indeed Negroes. By mid-1942 there were 6,394 negro GIs in Australia (representing nearly 40% of all U.S. black troops stationed overseas at the time⁹⁷), most of whom finished up in North Queensland where they

93. Ibid. (quoting Jean Devanny in Bird of Paradise).

94. Ibid.

95. CRS A816, 37/301/199 (Minister for Home Security to Prime Minister, 14/4/1943).

96. J.H. Moore, "Australians learn to live with big black bucks", op. cit.

97. Ibid.: "Only in Northwest Africa and the British Isles were they as numerous as in the southwest Pacific.... The most important concentration...was at Mt. Isa where by mid-1942 some 5,000 U.S. Personnel - 3,500 of them coloured - manned 1,482 vehicles."

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they laboured for Australians and built airstrips at places like Woodstock and Giru.⁹⁸ They had to use hand tools, build wheelbarrows out of boxes, clear the scrub with machetes and hire equipment from local farmers.⁹⁹ Although "far from urban centres" in the south, Woodstock and Giru were still about thirty miles outside Townsville. Not only the people of Sydney and Melbourne but also those of remote Townsville apparently had to be protected from nameless subversion, and even 'out of sight out of mind' was deemed inadequate insulation: Queensland newspapers were forbidden to carry either letterpress or photographs reporting coloured troops, and any reference at all to the colour of U.S. soldiers was ordered to be struck out.¹⁰⁰ The terms "negro" or "black" or "coloured" were officially regarded as being "detrimental".¹⁰¹ In these circumstances of almost Siberian segregation, the wonder is that the first negro regiments found their reception in Townsville "quite hospitable",¹⁰² though this may have been partly due to the efforts of the Townsville City Council to accommodate their biological urge by providing land, water and lighting for "a rather large bordello" if the American authorities undertook to erect it.¹⁰³ When that particular proposal foundered, some hundreds of Negroes from a large holding encampment just outside the suburb of Wulguru demonstrated their frustration by marching on the city "in a solid phalanx";

98. See U.G. Lee, The Employment of Negro Troops (Washington, 1966).

99. Ibid., p. 603: The 91st Engineer General Service Regiment, primarily a labour battalion, had no surveying equipment. "With only a carpenter's level, the field could not be properly laid out; drainage, slopes, grades and alignments could not be accurately plotted. With hand tools, the unit began clearing the area for three landing strips. Only machetes were available for cutting the high grass covering the area. With all men available for hand work, hand tools soon ran out, for there were not enough to go around. The unit rented equipment from nearby farmers, including a horse-drawn mowing machine and a farm tractor. Using an empty beer case, a section of a 14" log (felled by the farm tractor) as a wheel, a driftpin for an axle, and slender 6' poles for handles, the 91st devised homemade wheelbarrows. These were augmented by beer boxes rigged with wooden runners and drawn by two men holding a wooden pole on the end of a wire attached to the improvised sled."

100. See CAO, BP/361, 1-1, 1-1A (State Publicity Censor: Instruction to Press on United States Troops, 16/4/1942, 23/4/1942).

101. Ibid., 23/4/1942.

102. See U.G. Lee, The Employment of Negro Troops, op. cit., p. 600.

103. See Aikens Mem. (3), p. 120.

only the determined intervention by military police who were grimly armed, so one rumour went, with machine guns, finally turned them back.¹⁰⁴ The morale of the negro troops thereafter went rapidly to pieces. It wasn't restored by having to return to work twenty-four hours a day, "without making notable progress", in the arid desolation of the countryside south and west of Townsville.¹⁰⁵ "For all the work accomplished by the 91st in its first four months in Australia, it was stated to the battalion both orally and in writing that the unit might as well have stayed in the U.S."¹⁰⁶ - sentiments which were no doubt echoed by the GIs themselves when, in August 1942, as a result on increasing support provided by the influx of Australian servicemen, the last negro units left Townsville.¹⁰⁷

The fact that the morale of Townsville citizens did not completely disintegrate under the incubus of military occupation - though it came perilously close to doing so - was in large measure due to the resourcefulness and leadership of their municipal fathers. Far from being intimidated by the military or succumbing, as they must surely have been tempted, to the sheer mind-boggling enormity of totally unfamiliar problems, they took up the challenge in a vigilant and even imaginative way. The proving time was in February 1942 when Aikens called a public meeting in the Town Hall "to counteract distrust, defeatism and panic."¹⁰⁸ After forming a "Help Australia Committee", it was decided to appeal to the Council to send the Mayor to Canberra with a public plea for deliverance.¹⁰⁹ At a special meeting of the Council two days later, the Mayor saw his "bounden duty" as remaining in Townsville and Aikens was sent

104. See J.H. Moore, "Australians learn to live with big black bucks", op. cit. Cf. also Aikens Mem. (3), p. 120. Later, the American army apparently relented and set up several brothels for the exclusive use of negro troops, "much to the disgust of many civilians" (see Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.).

105. U.G. Lee, The Employment of Negro Troops, op. cit., pp. 602-604.

106. Ibid., p. 604.

107. See K.C. Dod, The Corps of Engineers: The War against Japan (Washington, 1966), p. 158.

108. TDB, 23/2/1942.

109. See TDB, 24/2/1942: "There appeared to be some panic, and silly rumours had gained credence. There was also a looseness of thinking and looseness of talking...a spirit of defeatism in Townsville."

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instead.¹¹⁰ This was the time when North Queenslanders were demanding the internment of "fascists", when Townsville's Volunteer Defence Corps of some 300 unarmed men were practically all that stood between North Queensland shores and a Japanese invasion, when rumours of sabotage swept the city, when police awakened people in the late hours of the night and the early hours of the morning, "causing the residents to believe that they were on the eve of an evacuation."¹¹¹ It was cold comfort to the citizens of Townsville to learn from Aikens that, although the North lay undefended, ministers of the government in Canberra wanted them to remain where they were "as had occurred in Russia, because the people left behind the enemy lines were the ones who were contributing most to the Nazi defeat."¹¹² Perhaps, however, Aikens' mission had not been all that futile: at least on 12 March the distribution of rifles to the VDC commenced.¹¹³

As 1942 drew on, troops arrived, and shortages became ever more stringent, the North Queenslander became fixed in his conviction that the Federal Government was mostly to blame for his depressing plight. He argued that civilian interests ought to have been given some measure of protection and that, in its failure to provide this, Canberra had been guilty of gross negligence and dereliction of duty.¹¹⁴ Again, the Townsville City Council stepped in to fill the void of leadership. On 9 November 1942 Aikens was elected Chairman of a "Special Committee" set up by the Council "to consider matters arising out of the war situation."¹¹⁵

110. TDB, 27/2/1942. See also TCC Mins. [24], p. 1618.

111. See Aikens' report to Council, given verbatim in TDB, 19/3/1942. See also TCC Mins. [24], p. 1619.

112. TDB, 19/3/1942.

113. Ibid.

114. See Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.

115. The Committee was originally constituted in May on a motion of Aikens'. See TCC Mins. [24], p. 1641: It was successfully moved "that a Special Committee consisting of the Deputy Mayor, Alderman Murgatroyd and Alderman Paterson to into the matter of the protection of the civilian population in Townsville: firstly, the position of the civilians in respect of civil defence; secondly, profiteering by the various business houses; thirdly, traffic control. At an Ordinary Meeting of the Council on 15 October 1942, the Mayor and Alderman Corcoran were added to the committee, which would also "deal with all matters arising out of the war situation excepting those which are already the functions of the present statutory committees" (see ibid., pp. 1689, 1690; and see TCC Reports [1942-1943], Vol. 18, unpaginated).

Within a month the Special Committee had ordered an investigation into the shortage of ice; recommended that the Price Fixing Commissioners fix the price of ice and bread; demanded that children receive priority quotas of milk; recommended that the Minister for War Organization of Industry institute a zoning system in Townsville for the distribution of meat, milk, ice and bread; instigated legal action against the "rack" selling of essential goods - the refusal to sell a tube, for example, unless the customer also purchased a tyre; ordered an investigation into the shortage of wood fuel; called for controls on the sale and distribution of fruit and vegetables; recommended the establishment of a Legal Aid Department "for the guidance of citizens as to their main rights as tenants under the Landlord and Tenants Regulations."¹¹⁶ Most of the recommendations were presently endorsed by the Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale;¹¹⁷ not only that, they were promptly implemented by the Townsville City Council.¹¹⁸

Some might think that it stretches historical analogy too far to compare the membership and functions of Townsville's war-time Special Committee with those of the Committee of Public Safety during the French Revolution, to see the three fiery Jacobins of Townsville - Aikens, Murgatroyd and Paterson - as modern counterparts of Robespierre, St. Just and Couthon. Yet both committees set out to achieve similar ends: to win the war by a determined mobilization of people and resources, and to repress civil strife and counter-revolution at home. For there was civil recrimination in Townsville. Like Robespierre's Laws of Maximum, the Special Committee's programme of "municipalizing" essential services and utilities provoked the dismay and antagonism of a section of Townsville's citizenry who were utterly opposed on ideological grounds to what they saw as the "red anting" of local government. Not all was sweetness, harmony and light among Townsville's civilian population, and there were times when the Jacobinism of Hermit Park Labour aroused the fierce

116. TCC Reports (1942-1943), op. cit.

117. See Appendix II.

118. See above, Chapter 3. Both the Municipal Ice Works and the Fruit and Vegetable Mart were placed under the control of the Special Committee at the beginning of 1944 (see TCC Reports [1942-1943], op. cit.

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resentment of the constituency of the Right. The Townsville Chamber of Commerce, for example, protested against the "wasteful expenditure" and "futility" of the Council's activities.¹¹⁹ For its part, the Council deplored that "a sprinkling of persons with fascist tendencies" should have monopolized the city's militia, the VDC;¹²⁰ it was alleged that "every officer of the VDC in Townsville had taken, at one time or another, an anti-labour political part" and that promotions in the VDC were causing "dissension" because of such "sectional control."¹²¹ This time the Returned Soldiers' League showed its disapproval by objecting to City Council representation at its farewells to recruits while a Communist, Paterson remained an alderman.¹²²

Dissension among civilians, however, was as nothing compared with the tension between civilians and the military, which made it all the more noteworthy when the Special Committee, at Aikens' prodding, successfully sponsored formal co-operation between the two. Indeed the only occasions on which City Council, State police, Australian and American military authorities ever acted in concert were at meetings of a Traffic Advisory Committee instigated and chaired by Aikens. In 1942 and 1943 the streets of Townsville were "busier than the principal thoroughfares of Sydney and Melbourne four years ago"; on one afternoon in January

119. See The Courier-Mail (Brisbane), 3/3/1942; also TCC Mins. [24], p. 1619. On 19 March Alderman Paterson moved in Council "that a letter be written to the Townsville Chamber of Commerce, that this Council regrets the publication of the Press item in the "Courier-Mail" and shall be pleased to know if such wire was sent to the Premier, and if so, whether it was approved of by the members of the Chamber, or, if it was not sent, the Council would be pleased if your Chamber would take steps to publish a denial in the "Courier-Mail" (TDB, 19/3/1942).

120. TDB, 19/3/1942.

121. Ibid.

122. See, for example, TDB, 21/11/1941: "The draft which left to reinforce the AIF abroad on Thursday evening was enthusiastically farewelled, although on this occasion the City Council was not represented at any of the gatherings.... The President of the R.S.S.A.I.L.A. asked the young recruits to have a parting glass with the old Diggers.... The troops after partaking of the excellent repast which is provided by the good women...there was community singing until such time as the troops marched off to the Central Station amid the usual enthusiastic scenes."

1943, 316 army trucks were counted in Flinders Street within the space of fifteen minutes.¹²³ Military drivers were notorious for their "carelessness and utter disregard for the safety of other users of the roads",¹²⁴ and in one two-month period 57 traffic accidents resulted in 13 fatalities.¹²⁵ The Traffic Advisory Committee took the lead of recommending amendments to the motor vehicle regulations, which included the imposition of a 25 m.p.h. speed limit within the boundaries of Townsville.¹²⁶ According to the Bulletin, the campaign bore good results, "despite the disregard of Townsville citizens who rode bikes at night without lights, sometimes two or three abreast, and who, in small-town fashion, paraded along Townsville's roadways in preference to the foot-paths, walking in the direction of the traffic instead of against it."¹²⁷

Thus, the Townsville City Council never once relaxed its efforts on behalf of a perplexed and sorely tried citizenry.¹²⁸ However, in the absence of any sustained interest on the part of the national government in dispelling the effects of isolation and occupation, the people's spirits faltered and almost failed. At the beginning of 1943, the Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale wondered whether Townsvilleans still had their hearts in the military conflict. It couldn't find much ground for optimism: "contributions have been made to war loans...again, although there have been one or two very minor holdups on the waterfront, the indefatigable efforts of the railway workers have won the unbounded admiration of everyone."¹²⁹ On the other hand, civilian vexation was so great that the Committee felt unable to guarantee, if the grievances of North Queenslanders remained unheard, that they would "still be willing to co-operate freely once the Japanese [had] been thrown out of New Guinea

123. Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.

124. Ibid.

125. See TDB, 21/12/1942 (reporting the "fifth fatality for a week"), 22/12/1942, 7/1/1943, 12/1/1943, 4/3/1943. Cf. also Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.

126. See TCC Mins. [24], p. 1706; TCC Reports (1942-1943), op. cit. See also TDB, 22/12/1942, 12/1/1943. Cf. Aikens Mem. (3), pp. 111 112.

127. See TDB, 7/1/1943, 12/1/1943.

128. See above, Chapter 3.

129. Report on Civilian Morale, op. cit.

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and their safety [was] no longer directly menaced."¹³⁰

By the end of 1943 there were few encouraging signs that civilian demoralization had been stanchd; to the contrary, a mass meeting of Townsville's citizens on the Strand listened intently to Aikens' bodeful recitation of Government neglect which hung over Townsville like the sword of Damocles, threatening her citizens with disaster. As late as mid-1944, North Queenslanders still nurtured "an abiding sense" that southern governments in Brisbane and Canberra were ignorant of their "total war-time experiences" and indifferent to them.¹³¹ The chief spokesman of that mood was Tom Aikens; and Townsvilleans now elected him to the Parliament in Brisbane to evoke it, to shame and bludgeon Government with it.

130. Ibid.

131. See CRS A816, 31/301/311, op. cit.

