Anonymous Japanese lie dead in the kunai grass at Gona in Papua New Guinea in December 1942, sprawled before a semi-circle of 10 Australian ‘diggers’ brandishing their weapons for the camera (see Figure 3.1). One of the Australians looks away, grinning sheepishly. Three-quarters of a century later, George Silk’s photograph is one of the signature photographs of a remorseless war fought with a racially charged viciousness. It first came to public notice in the overheated atmosphere of the conflict itself, in War in New Guinea (1943), an official photographic collection published by the Australian Government’s chief propaganda agency, the Department of Information (DOI). Over the years since, it has often appeared in both popular and scholarly histories of the Pacific War.

The image partakes of a long tradition of wartime ‘trophy pictures’, of victors displaying their dead or humiliating their captive enemy—a tradition that reached its nadir in 2004, with the publication of digital images of American military personnel mockingly torturing Iraqi detainees in Abu Ghraib prison outside Baghdad.1 The diggers in the photograph resemble big game hunters, posing proudly with their kill. In a struggle often described in the press of the day as a kind of hunt,

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Figure 3.1. George Silk, *Australian Soldiers with Japanese Dead after the Final Assault on Gona, Papua*, 17 December 1942.

Source: Australian War Memorial (AWM) 013881.
with the Japanese as the quarry, perhaps this is not surprising. In January 1943, reporter for the *Argus* Geoffrey Hutton wrote of remnants of retreating enemy being ‘hunted down’ by Australian patrols. Later that year, Hutton gave a verbal picture of the intense fighting taking place in thick, trackless jungle. This, he wrote, was ‘rather a manhunt than a battle’, with the Japanese ‘in full flight’. Ironically, given that Australian reportage customarily emphasised the superior virtuosity of Australian troops in their confrontation with the enemy, the caption to the photograph in *War in New Guinea* reports that the five Japanese had been killed by a single grenade. The diggers so flamboyantly parading their kill were enjoying a little vicarious fame.²

The ‘Pacific War’ is oxymoronic enough, without taking into account the mutual loathing of the antagonists. It was a deeply racialised encounter, which both suspended notions of common humanity and pitted contrasting modes of male military behaviour in and out of battle. In his study of the nexus of race and power that characterised the conflict, *War Without Mercy*, John Dower noted that both Allied commanders and common soldiers routinely used ‘exceedingly graphic and contemptuous’ imagery to denigrate a ‘uniquely contemptible’ foe. The revered American war correspondent Ernie Pyle expressed the common view that, while the European enemies were ‘people’, the Japanese were ‘something subhuman and repulsive’, likening them to cockroaches and mice.³

The Australians could be at least as brutal in expressing their aversion. In his study of their responses to their adversaries, *Fighting the Enemy*, Mark Johnston quoted the diary of a veteran of the fighting in North Africa, who exhibited ‘very humane’ attitudes to his Axis opponents in that theatre. Killing Japanese was different. To destroy ‘such repulsive looking animals’, he asserted, ‘was not murder’.⁴ This was a view encouraged by the military leadership. In an interview carried on the front page of the *New York Times* in January 1943, the commander of

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the Australian forces, General Sir Thomas Blamey, observed: ‘We are not dealing with humans as we know them … Our troops have the right view of the Japs. They regard them as vermin’. A few months earlier, giving a pep talk to his exhausted troops at the base camp outside Port Moresby, Blamey reportedly described the enemy as a ‘subhuman beast’ who was ‘a cross between the human being and the ape’. Warming to his theme, Blamey invited his men to take a journey deep into the ‘miasmic’ jungle and into the heart of darkness: ‘We must exterminate the Japanese’, he exhorted.5

This ethos of extermination seems to have permeated the corps of cameramen covering the Australian campaigns in the sweltering jungles and beachheads of New Guinea and neighbouring islands such as Borneo, Bougainville and the Bismarck Archipelago. A large corps of official photographers shooting for both government and military agencies expanded on an established frame of cultural reference created by longstanding national anxieties over the prospect of ‘White Australia’s’ vulnerability to Asian invasion. These anxieties were cultural and psychological as much as military and geopolitical. The Pacific War realised the racial fears that had for decades marked Australian responses to Japan. The late nineteenth-century male stereotypes of the quaintly charming Mikado and the self-sacrificing samurai, followed by the ambitious imperialist on a prolonged campaign of regional annexation in the first three decades of the new century, evolved into a terrifying new hybrid: the homicidal maniac of the 1940s.

Institutional resources were ploughed into photographing a threat to Australia itself after the fall of Singapore voided the region of British power and turned the isolated nation into a ‘bastion of the white race’.6 A new military Directorate of Public Relations (DPR) was formed in February 1942, augmenting and at times competing with the DOI, whose photographic teams comprised accredited civilians such as George Silk. A rebadged Military History Section (MHS) comprised photographers who were attested members of the armed services to provide an official pictorial record of what was an immense national

6 ‘Lesson of Singapore’, Argus, 13 February 1942, 2. In seeking parliamentary approval for declaring war on Japan after Pearl Harbor, Prime Minister John Curtin invoked upholding the ‘principle of a White Australia’ (quoted in Peter Dennis et al., The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995), 323).
3. SHOOTING JAPANESE

crisis. By the end of 1944, the New Guinea–based MHS had no fewer than nine teams shooting the war with Japan. Official photography was integral to the operations and public relations of other branches of the armed forces as well. A corps of up to 200 officially accredited photographers and cinematographers, supplemented by internally appointed unit photographers, covered the war.7

The Australian photographers were unequivocally ‘official’, with an identity intrinsically bound up with the national armed forces. Their affiliation came at a cost. Australian military and civilian agencies had fixed ideas about which of their pictures were deemed suitable for distribution; it was as if nothing life-threatening could be seen to have happened to Australians on the battlefield. The autocratic policies of the DOI were largely instrumental in the departure of the two most famous members of its photographic cohort, the New Zealand–born Silk and the celebrated, ill-fated Damien Parer, to work for independent American outlets. In Silk’s case, the move was prompted in part by the suppression of his Christmas Day 1942 photograph of a wounded, blindfolded Australian being tenderly escorted by a ‘Fuzzy Wuzzy Angel’, the Kiplingesque term applied to the Papua New Guineans who aided the Australians. The DOI apparently considered the picture a touch too distressing; snapped up by Life magazine and published in March 1943, it became one of the most famous images of the war.8

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7 Shaune Lakin, Contact: Photographs from the Australian War Memorial Collection (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 2006), 105, 137, 140. Lakin noted that some MHS photographs were misattributed to the DOI when published in Australian newspapers. The MHS was formed from the existing Military History and Information Service. On the institutional complexities surrounding the photography of the war, including conflict between the DPR and the DOI, and more broadly between the army, government and agencies themselves, see Ian Jackson, “Duplication, Rivalry and Friction”: The Australian Army, the Government and the Press during the Second World War, in The Information Battlefield: Representing Australians at War, ed. Kevin Foster (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2011), 74–85.

8 George Silk’s photograph of the Australian soldier ‘Dick’ Whittington being helped by the Papuan Raphael Oimbari at Buna, Papua New Guinea, 25 December 1942: AWM 014028. Subsequently, Silk resigned from the DOI to photograph for Life full-time. Out of solidarity with his colleague and disenchanted with the department over what he perceived as its parsimonious attitude to the payment of expenses, Parer soon followed suit, joining the US news organisation Paramount News. On the issue of censorship and Silk’s frustration at the department’s opposition to releasing his photographs of Australian casualties at Buna in New Guinea in late 1942, see also Lakin, Contact, 144, 156. For an account of the Silk/Parer resignations, see Niall Brennan, Damien Parer: Cameraman (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 144–56.
Frustration with bureaucratic interference did not prevent the Australian photographers, Silk and Parer included, from expressing the animus of the battlefield to a degree that went well beyond the obligation to produce effective propaganda. Reviewing *War in New Guinea*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* significantly complimented his courage in moving to the ‘vanguard’ of the fighting, ‘heedless of danger’, to record ‘with sympathy’ the ‘heroic performance’ of the soldiers. The photographers shared the soldiers’ travails as well as their triumphs. In 1943, Damien Parer wrote that the Australians showed ‘no beg-pardons’ to an enemy increasingly loathed as reports of battlefield savagery and treatment of prisoners spread throughout both the war zones and the home front. ‘The Jap’, Parer opined, ‘is a fanatic with a subnormal, animal cunning’, who was no match for the Australian ‘diggers’, whose ‘greatness as infantrymen’ was confirmed each time he went into battle to film them. Bloodied, spreadeagled or quietly decomposing, the Japanese was considered fair photographic game.

Capturing the Japanese Dead

Some 6,000 Australian soldiers are known to have died fighting the Japanese in the Pacific campaign. However, there is very little evidence of this heavy toll in the published oeuvre of official Australian photography. In the US, the censors working for the American counterpart of the DOI, the Office of War Information, at first also routinely suppressed pictures of men killed in action, on the grounds that they would sap national morale. However, in 1943, the American administration decided that complacency was even more dangerous than demoralisation, and images of the national dead began to emerge, beginning with George Strock’s famous picture of American marines washed up on Buna Beach in New Guinea, published in *Life* in September 1943. By contrast, the DOI’s intransigence on this issue lasted right through to the end of the war, and the policy has continued up to and including the war in Afghanistan.9

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Squeamish about the publication of images of dead Australians, the censors were far less fussy when it came to the taking and distribution of pictures of dead Japanese. Military photography has long sought to boost morale by circulating pictures of enemy casualties. In Regarding the Pain of Others, Sontag cited the case of a photograph of unburied British dead taken after the Boers’ victory at Skion Kop in 1900, published to great British indignation. ‘To display the dead’, she wrote, ‘is what the enemy does’.11 Yet the preponderance of photographs of dead Japanese is striking. As Shaune Lakin noted in his superbly detailed study of Australian military photography, Contact, this is at odds with the relative scarcity of pictures of European casualties in campaigns against the Germans and Italians in North Africa.12 This revealing disparity can be attributed to the increasingly poisonous hatred of the Japanese as the Pacific War dragged on, which exacerbated cultural views of them as somehow less than fully human.

Certainly, the intensity of the fighting contributed to the representational contempt for the Japanese. In a late 1942 report on the Allied offensive on the Japanese beachheads of Buna-Gona on the north coast of New Guinea, the leading reporter (and future novelist) George Johnston described the encounter as ‘coldly animal’. When machine guns and mortars did not do the job, the fighting became personal. Men wrestled to the ground, strangling or stabbing each other to death. After several terrible days the Australians were emerging the stronger, and ‘the piles of Japanese dead’ were ‘mounting higher’.13

The omnipresence of death hardened hearts and minds in soldier and photographer alike. Melbourne-born Norman Stuckey, a member of the MHS, was a brave and fastidious photographer. Shooting the Australian advance on Shaggy Ridge in New Guinea in December 1943, he got so close to the action that a blast shattered the glass in his camera. In the aftermath of this successful assault, Stuckey photographed Australians unearthing and examining enemy dead. A bloodied Japanese corpse is dragged out of what looks like some kind of dugout or ‘foxhole’ as such defensive positions were called (see Figure 3.2). As Shaune Lakin observed, the ‘shocking’ frankness of the photograph is accentuated by

12  Lakin, Contact, 143.
13  George H. Johnston, ‘Kill or Be Killed at Buna’, Argus, 9 December 1942, 2.
Figure 3.2. Norman Stuckey, *Troops of the 2/16th Australian Infantry Battalion Unearth a Dead Japanese Soldier*, Shaggy Ridge area, New Guinea, 27 December 1943.

Source: AWM 062305.
Stuckey’s point of view, looking down on the dead man from the edge of the trench.\footnote{Lakin, \textit{Contact}, 143. See F.R. Peterson, ‘Cameraman in ‘Thick of Fight’, \textit{Herald}, 8 February 1944, 8. See Stuckey photograph, AWM 062304.} Perhaps more shocking is that this is actually one of at least two pictures Stuckey took of the scene; another, taken a little further away, shows the Australian dragging the body by his other hand and the onlookers are positioned slightly differently. The grisly ritual had been repeated for the photographer’s benefit.

Taking evidence of Nazi depravity at newly liberated Bergen-Belsen in April 1945, the English photographer George Rodger was so ashamed at arranging the chaos of dreadful carnage into a pleasing composition in the viewfinder that he temporarily gave up photographing war altogether.\footnote{See interview with George Rodger in \textit{Dialogue with Photography}, eds. Paul Hill and Thomas Cooper (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 59–60; quoted in Zelizer, \textit{Remembering to Forget}, 88–89.} Yet, it would be unfair to attribute callousness to Stuckey or indeed any of the Australian cameramen. As an MHS operative, it was his professional duty to document the process of frisking enemy casualties for whatever information they might hold. As John Taylor noted in \textit{Body Horror}, the camera itself and the process of framing pictures distances the photographer from the subject matter, however horrifying.\footnote{John Taylor, \textit{Body Horror: Photojournalism, Catastrophe and War} (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 13. The \textit{Life} photographer Margaret Bourke-White, who accompanied the forces into the murder camps, has written of a ‘protective veil’ that came over her while photographing the carnage. Margaret Bourke-White, \textit{Portrait of Myself} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), 160, quoted in Zelizer, \textit{Remembering to Forget}, 88.} Nonetheless, Stuckey’s recomposition of the scene, and the scant respect for the identity of the dead soldier, reveals the deliberateness with which the Australian photographers went about their business—and their attitude towards the Japanese.

Little respect was afforded to the corpses by either their adversary or their photographer. In one photograph, Australian troops in Bougainville in January 1945 are pictured with a mutilated Japanese corpse, with one of the Australians about to enjoy a celebratory cigarette (see Figure 3.3). Perhaps the men were directed by the anonymous photographer to point their weapons so melodramatically at the body, but their gesture is gratuitous, for he is well dead. Yet, at least the casualty, lying face down on the jungle floor, is unidentifiable. Anonymity, as Paul Fussell has remarked, is a convention in Allied photography of the war; in Strock’s picture of the dismal scene at Buna Beach, the corpses lie ‘ostentatiously’
face down in the wet sand. By the time of the D-day landings in June 1944, photographs of dead GIs appeared regularly in American news magazines, but always prone, shrouded or with their heads turned away from the camera. ‘This is a dignity’, Sontag observed of the brazen photographic display of the dead from ‘exotic’ places, ‘not thought necessary to accord to others’.17

Certainly, respect for the enemy’s basic human dignity is not one the Australians routinely afforded the Japanese. In June 1945, on Labuan Island off the coast of Borneo, a Japanese sniper was shot by Australian troops while senior officers, including Allied Supreme Commander General Douglas MacArthur, were touring the area. A photographer took several pictures of the body from different angles and distances, including one of the general himself by the corpse. The final photograph is a disturbingly intimate portrait of the bloodied death face of a young man perhaps no more than 20 years old. On occasion, the photographers went out of their way to highlight the identity of the fallen opponent. In one photograph, two Australian soldiers—brothers from Sydney—search the bodies of dead Japanese in Brunei, North Borneo (see Figure 3.4). One of them roughly holds up the head of one of them to face the photographer. This brutal image does not reflect well on the official photographer, who would have directed the soldier to lift the limp head of the deceased for the benefit of the camera.18

The cumulative impression provided by the host of images of Japanese war dead is that they had been overwhelmed by a superior opponent. Clearly that was the perception of the popular Sydney-based weekly photo magazine *Pix*, an important outlet for the official photographs.

18 Anonymous photographs, Labuan, 10 June 1945, AWM 109148. See also AWM 109145, AWM 109146, AWM 109147. The two Australians in the picture are identified as Private G.B. Creber and Lance Corporal J.H. Creber. The WWII Nominal Roll lists their birthdates as 2 December 1921 and 3 November 1921 respectively, but both with the same mother. It is likely that the former put up his age upon enlistment in June 1941 (to be able to do so); the inscription on his gravestone in the cemetery at Bellingen, New South Wales, indicates that he was born in 1924. The contemptuous close-up of Japanese corpses was not confined to the still photographers. In her discussion of Damien Parer’s newsreel Assault on Salamua (1943), Keiko Tamura remarked how his ‘close and steady shots’ of dead Japanese, contrasted with his ‘fast and moving’ footage of the actual fighting, expresses Parer’s ‘unforgiving’ attitude towards the enemy. See Keiko Tamura, ‘Shooting an Invisible Enemy: Images of Japanese Soldiers in Damien Parer’s New Guinea Newsreels’, The Journal of Pacific History 45, no. 1 (2010): 130.
Figure 3.3. Unknown photographer, *Troops of 47th Australian Infantry Battalion with Dead Japanese by Enemy Pillbox*, Bougainville, 16 January 1945.
Source: AWM 078485.

Figure 3.4. Unknown photographer, *Troops of the 2/17th Australian Infantry Battalion Search Japanese Bodies*, Brunei, North Borneo, 13 June 1945.
Source: AWM 109317.
'Aussies Beat Japs in Jungle Fighr’, published in October 1943, was illustrated with images of Australians assisting wounded comrades, along with the testimonial of US paratroopers said to be ‘amazed’ by their courage. Supplied by the DOI, these pictures include a photograph of an identifiable Japanese corpse. He had been killed near Lae, in a bloody skirmish in which Australian casualties were claimed to be ‘extraordinarily light’.19

Not all photographs of dead Japanese were considered suitable for circulation. One such case is the MHS photographer Ronald Keam’s image of a mass grave dug for Japanese casualties after an unsuccessful assault on an Australian position in Bougainville in April 1945 (see Figure 3.5). In its digitised archive of photographs, the Australian War Memorial captions the image by suggesting that Australian troops were ‘placing’ the Japanese into the grave, but the image reveals that the troops were simply hurling the bodies into the trench. Of course they were engaged in a ghastly task, not one to dither over, and the Australians were performing a humane service by not leaving the corpses to rot in the jungle, to be consumed by rats and bugs. Nonetheless, it was not an image that invited public exposure at the very time when the liberation of the Nazi death camps had brought to public notice scences of mass killings. Australian newspapers were full of Holocaust horror stories, but photographs from the camps were used sparingly.20 However, in May 1945 Life magazine published selected work by the posse of photographers accompanying the invading Allied armies into the concentration camps, dreadful images of decomposing corpses and other horrors that created an outcry. Thus, there was a powerful impediment to the dissemination of photographs revealing the Allies’ own hand in mass death. Agonising over the relentless firebombing of Japanese cities in the early months of 1945—but just a matter of weeks before the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—US Secretary of War Henry Stimson had worried about ‘the United States getting the reputation for outdoing Hitler in atrocities’.21 For their part, the Australians did not want to appear to be heartless mass killers, even of the Japanese military. Victory had to be seen as moral as well as military.

19 Pix, 30 October 1943, 5.
20 Anderson, ‘Chasing the Pictures’, 50.
The Australian photographers were capturing not only the ‘battle for Australia’, but also a contest of competing races. More specifically, the acute hostility to the Japanese in the official photography suggests that the war was envisaged as a battle of rival codes of manhood, conceptualised over decades of Australian trepidation at the military ambitions of Japan. Punning on the language of photography, with its jargon of ‘loading’, ‘aiming’ and ‘shooting’, Sontag long ago described the camera as a phallic ‘sublimation of the gun’. This is an assertion that can be usefully applied to the photographic representation of the ferocious conflict in the Pacific.

The history of Australian fear of the Japanese bogeyman needs to be understood if, in turn, the photography of the war is to be appreciated. In March 1942, the DOI sought to stiffen Australian resolve in the face of the unnervingly rapid Japanese southward thrust by mounting a propaganda campaign titled ‘Know Your Enemy’. The campaign was short lived but virulent: a two-week flurry of posters, articles and news releases, supported by radio broadcasts on the national broadcaster each evening, advertised by provocative two-minute messages broadcast throughout the day. The principal aim was to debunk the opponent’s reputation as a ‘super-fighter’, largely through volleys of racial abuse. The Japanese were variously ‘little monkey-men of the North’; a ‘bespectacled ape-like race that lent colour to the theory of evolution’; and ‘semi-civilised savages, ready to aid and abet the grossest indecencies and the most bestial animalism’. A series of newspaper advertisements concluded with the words ‘We’ve always despised them—NOW WE MUST SMASH THEM!’ The ‘we’ is identified as ‘every White Australian’.23

In fact, Australians had not ‘always despised’ the Japanese. The capricious cruelty of Japan’s military during the war exposed the ‘glorious chivalric code’ of bushido as a self-serving myth, wrote the war correspondent Rohan Rivett, a survivor of the Burma-Siam Railway, in the Argus in September 1945.24 Yet there was a time, around the turn of the century as Japan began its rise to regional military pre-eminence, when bushido was viewed with admiration in Australia. In 1904, an Adelaide newspaper, the Register, praised the precepts of the code as ‘a powerful moral force’ akin to chivalry, though the analogy was ‘inadequate, for bushido rises to a loftier moral elevation’.25 In the wake of the Japanese Navy’s impressive defeat of Tsarist Russia’s fleet at Tsushima in 1905, a Melbourne politician, George Swinburne, recommended the implementation of a local version of the Japanese warrior code, and the Melbourne Punch published a jaunty verse comparing the trivial pursuits of sports-mad urban Australians with the sterner disciplines on display from martial Japan: “There’s common sense and wisdom, as the Japanese can show/In Ju Jitsu and straight shooting and hard-hitting “Bushido””.26

24 Rohan D. Rivett, ‘It is Bushido to Torture the Sick’, Argus, 20 September 1945, 2.
Meiji Japan was a new imperial power that Australia could relate to and learn from. Overlooking the oppression that attended Japan’s annexation of Formosa and Korea, the Register in 1905 lauded its ‘entirely peaceful and beneficent’ influence on the ‘decadent communities’ of the Far East. Japanese colonialism was paid the ultimate compliment by being said to exhibit ‘the virtues of Anglo-Saxondom’. Referencing the Gilbert and Sullivan light opera that had popularised Japan in Western culture, the Register described ‘The Mikado’ as ‘a highly civilized monarch’. The conduct of his military garrisons was exemplary and there were ‘no signs’ that his subjects ‘have the slightest ambition to become bloodthirsty despoilers of foreign territories’.27

Not all Australians took such a sanguine view. Japan’s muscle flexing was met with foreboding in a country that had for several decades grappled with the spectre of being swamped by Asian migration. In the years before WWI, several fictions fantasised about the prospect of Japanese invasion, and in terms that saw the coming war as a test of national manhood. Discussing works such as C.H. Kirmess’s novel The Australian Crisis (1909), David Walker wrote: ‘Japan had an elaborately codified warrior tradition in bushido. Warrior Japan created a powerful case for an answering tradition of defiant masculinity in Australia’. In these imaginary wars, ‘the man-to-man encounter with the Japanese was presented as central to Australia’s future’.28 In The Australian Crisis, a Japanese invasion of the nation’s vulnerable, sparsely populated north is challenged by a volunteer ‘White Guard’ of hardy pioneering types—‘typical Australians’ who were fighting for ‘Aryan ideals’. Outnumbered, these ‘sturdy sons of the Bush’ have to fall back and the government grudgingly cedes the Japanese-occupied territory to the nominal control of the British.29

Invasion novels such as The Australian Crisis reflect a sense that urbanising Australia was losing its rural-derived virility, the source of so much of its national myth making. Kirmess suggested that Japanese merchants and travellers to Australia, including the naval squadrons that visited major Australian ports in the first decade of the new century after Japan’s

27 ‘Japan as a Civilizing Agent’, Register, 14 June 1905, 4.
signing of an alliance with Britain, must have observed ‘all the symptoms of indolent culture, love of play, indulgences in luxuries and careless national pride’. Belligerently committed to the maintenance of ‘White Australia’, the nationalist journal the *Bulletin* had supported Russians in the war with Japan. When a Japanese naval training squadron called on Australian ports in 1906, a *Bulletin* editorialist lampooned the enthusiasm created by the visit of the ‘Jap sailor-men’, derisively labelling it ‘a circus’. After all, what was Japan but a comic opera of a country, whose soldiers ‘fought with curios’ and with ‘fans for shields’?

The *Bulletin*’s disdain for the ‘feminine fuss’ surrounding the visitors goes beyond instinctive racism. The Japanese were a sexual threat and sexual competitor. David Walker referred to T.R. Roydhouse’s obscure 1903 novel *The Coloured Conquest* in which an Australian strikes a Japanese naval officer who had undiplomatically made advances to his fiancée at a civic reception in honour of a training squadron’s visit to Sydney in May 1903. The Australian’s gesture is futile; the Japanese eventually invade Sydney and take possession of the women as well. Significantly, the Japanese aggression in China in the 1930s and, in particular, what soon became known as the Rape of Nanking, was widely reported in Australia as a welter of sexual violence and sadism. In February 1938, the *Argus* specified ‘outrageous brutalities’ committed against Chinese nurses and nuns in Nanking hospital, and elsewhere of drunken rape and murder at a girls’ school and the beheading of catechists at Roman Catholic missions. Later that year, *Pix* ran a photo spread of Japanese atrocities in Nanking and elsewhere, pictures purportedly taken for pleasure by Japanese soldiers and secretly developed and circulated by Chinese printers. The article was titled ‘Killing For Fun’.

Therefore, in the dark days of early 1942, when Japanese invasion seemed a distinct possibility, it was predictable that such a nightmare invoked the havoc that would be wrought on Australian women as a result. As the nation braced itself for battle, cartoons ironically titled...
‘Bushido’ in Melbourne’s Argus and Sydney’s World’s News showed monstrous Japanese ogres having their way with white womanhood. The war was a definitive challenge to Australian manhood. In The Australian Crisis, a truce is called until ‘1940 A.D.’, by which time the nation had to ‘get ready’ to reclaim the land in the country’s north lost to the marauding Japanese and so ‘save the purity of the race by sweeping the brown invaders back over the coral sea’. History laced with Australian military mythology was to prove the novel prescient. A nation under siege was to be defended by racial stock reinvigorated by the experience of WWI. The men of the Second Australian Imperial Force (AIF) were following in the footsteps of their fathers in the earlier war. They were the ‘Anzacs’—the acronym ascribed the men of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps—whose elan at Gallipoli in Turkey in 1915 seemed to partake of the legendary heroism of the Homeric warriors at nearby Troy. In January 1940, the Argus juxtaposed a photograph of the men of the new AIF marching off to war through Melbourne streets with a similar one of its famous predecessor parading through the same streets in 1914. ‘A generation separates the two forces’, the caption stated, ‘but the race remains the same’. The analogy was made not merely through juxtaposition but also through an intertextual referencing of pictures of the fresh generation of Anzacs to well-known images from WWI.

Many photographs of the Pacific campaign present distinctive Australian military types who bear the Anzac imprint—amiable rogues who pose cheerfully for the camera without self-consciousness or arrogance. However, sometimes the priorities of DOI propaganda overrode professional good sense. In 1941, Silk’s picture of a trio of smiling diggers (evacuees from Crete photographed in Alexandria) featured prominently in army recruitment posters. In a colloquial tribute to a late nineteenth-century bushranger, the photograph is captioned ‘They’re still as game as Ned Kelly’. Yet Silk’s publicity photograph of Lieutenant John R. Greenwood, taken in the Kokoda area in November 1942, owes more to the imagery of the Wild West in popular Hollywood films than to anything peculiarly Australian (see Figure 3.6). With his elegant moustache, bare chest, headband and firm hand upon his Tommy gun, the figure’s stance

37  Kirmess, Australian Crisis, 335.
38  ‘To-day Echoes the Marching of Anzac Feet’, Argus, 16 January 1940, 1; see Lakin, Contact, 102.
is of a movie star more than a soldier engaged in the ugly flesh-and-blood saga being enacted in New Guinea. Facially, the soldier looks uncannily like the publicity photographs of the character played by the Australian-born Errol Flynn in the popular 1939 western *Dodge City*.39 There is something desperate about the photograph. In addition to its surely unintended tincture of homoeroticism, the photograph betrays a certain insecurity, of the kind detected by the enormously respected

39 See Silk photograph, June 1941, AWM 007786; Recruitment poster, AWM ARTV04332. Hollywood’s Wild West seemed to have been on Australian minds in New Guinea. George Johnston likened a Papuan comrade’s habit of collecting military insignia of Japanese he had personally killed to ‘gunmen of the Wild West’ putting notches in the revolver butts to signify their victims. See Johnston, *Toughest Fighting in the World*, 143.
official historian of WWI, C.E.W. Bean. In a March 1942 letter to the Sydney Morning Herald, Bean complained about the excessive tone of the DOI propaganda. The ‘hate campaign’, he wrote, reminded him ‘of nothing so much as a small frightened boy loudly bragging to keep his spirits up’.40

How could the Japanese possibly compete with the antipodean demigod? That was the intended message. Man to man, he just could not hope to measure up. As if to reinforce this point, photographs of captured Japanese soldiers were habitually framed to emphasise and exaggerate the physical disparity in the two competing bodies of men. On the island of Morotai near the end of the war, a diminutive Japanese internee is pictured between two Australians derisively looking down on him (see Figure 3.7). Possibly a member of the corps of photographers, one of the Australians has a camera hanging around his neck and wears a mocking grin. The caption comments that the Japanese, a member of a commando unit, ‘answers to the name of “Mickey Mouse”’.40

It was necessary for the Australians to be pictured as more than superior fighters. They had to display ‘virtue’ in both its senses—the virtuosity etymologically associated with male skill in battle and the virtuous morality of just victors. Belittling disempowered Japanese like ‘Mickey Mouse’ does not make for an attractive image of the Australian captor. However, it was an improvement on Japan’s disgraceful treatment of its prisoners. Ironically, the most arresting photograph of the prisoner of war (POW) ordeal, and the one which most hardened Australian resolve to track down and punish Japanese war criminals, was in all probability taken by a Japanese. Still, after countless viewings, the well-known photograph of the beheading of the Australian commando Len Siffleet—executed along with two Ambonese privates on a beach at Aitape in northern New Guinea in October 1943—manages to send a chill up the spine. A captured Western soldier, blindfolded, bound and bedraggled, kneels by a hastily dug grave. Above him stands his Japanese executioner, sword raised, while in the background a crowd of local people and armed soldiers looks on. One Japanese soldier, centre picture, appears to be grinning in anticipation. American soldiers found the picture on the corpse of a Japanese soldier in 1944. Part of a collection of some 22, it was first published in *Life* magazine in May 1945.

At the time and for some years afterward, Len Siffleet was incorrectly identified as the decorated Australian airman William Newman, beheaded in Salamaua New Guinea in March 1943; Newton’s body was never found, nor was Siffleet’s. Nonetheless, this photograph of uncertain provenance became part of a bulging body of documentary evidence used to prosecute Japanese war criminals at the military trials that took place throughout the region after the surrender. The biggest trial of all, the International Military Tribunal for the Far East in Tokyo, was presided over by an Australian judge, Sir William Webb, whose report detailing a litany of Japanese crimes, including cannibalism and the rape and mutilation of both native and white women, horrified the public when circulated in Australian newspapers soon after the surrender in September 1945. Handwritten notes scribbled onto a copy of the

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41 ‘A Japanese Atrocity’, *Life*, 14 May 1945, 96. Newton’s beheading was met with outrage, especially after the publication of the captured diary of an observer of the execution who proudly described the event as ‘a manifestation of the magnanimity that becomes a chivalrous Samurai’. See ‘Barbaric Act by Japanese: Diary’s Story of an Execution’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 October 1943, 9. On the misidentification of the photograph, see Don Dick, ‘Jap beheaded Australian’, *Sunday Telegraph*, 2 September 1945, 3.

Siffleet photograph as published in *Life* labels it ‘Exhibit No. 5’ and lists the name of a member of the Australian Army’s corps of war crimes investigators, Captain V.A.R. Chapple.

Evidentiary photographs produced, authorised and circulated by the DOI also found their way into the press at the time. One of the most notable, of men released from a hospital in Singapore’s Changi, was published in *Sydney Morning Herald* under the unequivocal heading ‘Evidence of Suffering in Prison Camp’. In March 1946, the *Argus* published photographs of a military trial taking place in Darwin (see Figure 3.8). The stern-faced Australian members of the court are juxtaposed against an image of the Japanese accused of atrocities against their countrymen. Listening intently or diligently taking notes while the charges against them are read, the accused do not look particularly humbled and contrite. Nonetheless it must have been consoling to see the Japanese being brought to account. Yet the image would hardly have quelled the public outrage created by the photographs of the brutalised Australian survivors in internment camps that regularly appeared in national newspapers in the weeks and months after the war’s end. These

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43 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 September 1945, 4.
illustrated accounts of the atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese military throughout the Pacific as journalists and photographers entered camps from Singapore to Yokohama and documented the stories of the men.44

The Australian treatment of captured Japanese was presented by contrast as a model of humanity. An anti-Japan diatribe filed from Tokyo by the Sydney Morning Herald journalist William Marien in early September 1945 is accompanied by a photograph of Japanese POW hospital patients in the Australian compound at Morotai, as they enjoy an unlikely lunch of ‘chicken, potatoes and salad, followed by rice and cream custard’. In case readers miss the point, the caption stresses how well cared for they are, ‘in contrast to the brutality of the Japanese in their treatment of war prisoners’.45 The DOI collection War in New Guinea juxtaposes images of Japanese dead after the bloody fighting at Gona with pictures of wounded or exhausted prisoners being tended by the Australian victors.

The DOI was determined to promote the image of the humane victor and the magnificently effective antagonist. Numerous photographs were taken of Australians providing succour to injured or starving Japanese. Put simply, they were ‘good propaganda’, in the phrase used by George Silk to describe his image of a Queensland private piggybacking a stricken Japanese back to camp, to be treated and tended (see Figure 3.9).46 Use was made of such uplifting photographs during the war in the Australian Military Forces’ frankly propagandist (published by the Australian War Memorial) Jungle Warfare: With the Australian Army in the South-west Pacific (1944). Tellingly, they continue to illustrate contemporary accounts of the Pacific campaign as appealing testimony to Australian humanity—photographs of Japanese prisoners drinking from an Australian’s water bottle appear in two identically titled popular blockbusters published in 2005, Peter FitzSimons’ Kokoda and Paul Ham’s Kokoda.47

44 Argus, 5 March 1946, 1. For horrifying stories see, for example, George H. Johnston, ‘Brutality of Jap Guards: Pathetic Stories Told by Australian POW’s’, Argus, 1 September 1945, 1; ‘Japanese Hands Sword to Australian General’, Sydney Morning Herald, 10 September 1945, 1; Jack Percival, ‘Prisoners Beaten to Death: Grim Accounts from Japan’, Sydney Morning Herald, 5 September 1945, 1; Graham Jenkins, ‘Six Australians of 1800 Survive Borneo Horror’, Argus, 22 September 1945, 1.
46 Silk quoted in McDonald and Brune, 200 Shots, 118. See the sequence of a distressed Japanese prisoner being cared for by Australian stretcher bearers: AWM 026822, AWM 026824, AWM 026825, AWM 026827; see also AWM 026839, AWM 013455.
At times, the Australians overplayed their hand in presenting themselves as beneficent captors. In early July 1944, a photographer working for the propaganda and field intelligence unit, the Far Eastern Liaison Office (FELO), took a series of photographs of robust Japanese prisoners playing baseball at the POW camp in Cowra, New South Wales. Part of FELO’s brief was to undermine morale in Japanese-held parts of the south-west Pacific theatre by producing leaflets that were printed and air dropped by the million. It was for this purpose that the scenes of the Cowra idyll were taken. The camp buildings are neat and evidently commodious and the playing fields wide and inviting. Surely this was an attractive option to starvation and probable death in a fetid, claustrophobic jungle.

This was wishful thinking that did not take into account the acute sense of dishonour attached to surrender by the Japanese. Though there had been rumours of trouble brewing at the Cowra camp, the FELO photographer could not have anticipated the mass escape of more than a thousand Japanese POWs in the early hours of 5 August 1944. In what has become known as the ‘Cowra Breakout’, four Australians and well over 200 Japanese died,

Figure 3.9. George Silk, Wounded Japanese Carried by Australian Soldier, c. 1942.

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48 Cowra camp photographs, 1 July 1944: AWM 06717; AWM 067179; AWM 067187; AWM 067188.
many shot dead while armed only with primitive weapons, including baseball bats. Disturbed by the implications of the breakout, Australian Government censors imposed severe restrictions on media reports of the episode. The Cowra camp principally housed Japanese and Italian POWs, but no specific identification of the nationality of the escapees was to be made. Sydney’s *Sunday Telegraph* was deemed to have defied the ban by mentioning that some escapees had been discovered in ‘foxholes’, thereby alerting a readership familiar with reportage of the New Guinea campaign that they were Japanese. The newspaper’s editor was rebuked by both the wartime Minister for Information Calwell and Prime Minister Curtin for putting the lives of Australians then in Japanese hands at risk.49 Such was the fear of an enemy that did not play by the rules (and had not signed the Geneva Convention on the treatment of POWs). Of the Japanese dead, over 30 committed suicide, many by hanging. Two escapees lay on the train tracks and were run over by the morning train from Sydney. A cornered escapee was photographed still clutching the knife he had used to sever his own throat so deeply that he had nearly succeeded in decapitating himself. The picture, a disturbing revelation of the kind of enemy who would do anything to win and anything to avoid capture, was never published.50

The Japanese may have had other reasons for refusing to surrender on the battlefield, for despite their own projected image as kindly captors, the Australians had acquired a reputation for mercilessness. Prisoners were a burden, and many did not make it to camp or compound. The summary shooting of wounded Japanese (and some who were not wounded) was not uncommon, if conspicuously unpublicised. The official war artist Ivor Hele’s charcoal drawing of the calm execution of stricken Japanese at Timbered Knoll in New Guinea in 1943 was long suppressed. Daien Parer, who was in the area at the time, chose not to film these episodes, though he did take some photographs of dead Japanese in their foxholes.51 While the Australian treatment of its surviving captives was generally in accordance with regulations, it

was touched by an ugly triumphalism that sought to humiliate and demean. A picture supplied to the Argus captures two injured and ailing Japanese being brought into camp on the back of a jeep driven by two diggers—teeth bared in jubilation—looking like they have been out on a particularly productive kangaroo shoot (see Figure 3.10).

Photographing the process of capture became an exercise in ritual humiliation. In a sequence of pictures of the capture of an unnamed Japanese prisoner in New Guinea in May 1943, Norman Stuckey himself participated in the documentation of the prisoner’s degradation. Stuckey photographed the prisoner being brought into camp. Later, several photographs taken by both himself and two colleagues working for the DOI show the Japanese alongside his smirking captors. Finally, Stuckey had a photo taken of himself with the prisoner and an Australian guard, holding a drawn bayonet menacingly by the captive’s face (see Figure 3.11). The sequence hardly plumbs the debased level of digital
images (made by amateurs) of vile abuse inflicted on Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib, taken in late 2003. Nonetheless, it transgresses the specifications of the MHS photographer’s professional requirement to document with objectivity. The MHS director John Treloar was a firm advocate for impersonality in the creation of photographic records, believing that the identity of the photographer should be lost in the photograph’s factual historicity. Indeed, when MHS photographs were published, the specific photographer’s identity (and even the section itself) was usually concealed. One wonders whether the presence of the camera encouraged Stuckey’s exhibitionism and, thus, contributed to the prisoner’s mistreatment. Here, the Japanese prisoner’s face bears the imprint of humiliation and abject disgrace—having his picture taken, with the possibility the image might be seen by his family back home, is itself a form of torture.52

52 On the MHS strictures of impersonality and impartiality, see Lakin, Contact, 113, 140. Photographs, Dumpu New Guinea, 5 May 1943, AWM 058654; AWM 058651; AWM 016310; AWM 016314. The two colleagues were the photographers Gordon Short and Harold Dick. (Dick was later killed in an air accident in Queensland.) See also a George Silk sequence of photographs of the capture process, taken in the Oivi-Kokoda area in November 1942: AWM 151093; AWM 151094; AWM 151095.
The greater misery of national defeat was one that every Japanese serviceman had to bear. Many took it personally. Looking back at 1945, one middle-aged veteran recalled that losing the war for Japanese men meant ‘losing their balls’. Defeat was exacerbated by returning home to a country taken over and occupied by their antagonists, and a booming sexual commerce between Japanese women and foreigners. Approximately 8 million Japanese military personnel were either repatriated from overseas theatres or demobilised from the Japanese Home Forces. Having joined the American-led Occupation of Japan as part of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF), Australian military personnel had already processed several hundred thousand Japanese repatriates by mid-1946. Much of this activity took place in Hiroshima Prefecture, where the Australian forces were largely based. One of the centres for the reception and demobilisation of returning Japanese was located at Hiroshima’s port, Ujina. From 1894, when Japan’s Supreme Imperial Headquarters moved to the Hiroshima Castle compound, the city was a major staging base, and soldiers were sent off from Ujina to the various military ventures that Japan embarked on over the ensuing decades. Ujina also housed the Gaisenkan, ‘The Hall of Victorious Return’, built to welcome home the nation’s all-conquering armies, outside of which stood two ancient stone lions plundered from China. The defeated Japanese returnees from the Pacific had to re-enter Japan through it—a bitter irony that would not have been lost on them.

Australian military photographers were waiting in Occupied Japan to capture the dejected homecoming. Allan Cuthbert, the first photographer appointed to MHS BCOF, photographed schoolgirls dutifully greeting a returning POW upon his belated arrival in June 1946 as he casts a rueful, almost furtive sideways glance at the camera (see Figure 3.12). It is a moment of supreme bathos. The decades of Japanese militarism—so damaging to untold peoples in the region and so catastrophically self-destructive—had come to an ignominious end. The Japanese were still wending their way home in August 1947, two years after the surrender,

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when *Pix* ran a photo spread of Australian troops processing the stragglers. *Pix* could not help itself. A picture of soldiers being deloused was captioned ‘Big Vermin have Little Vermin’.54

**Photographic Overkill**

Australia can be proud of the achievements of its photographers of the war against the Japanese in the Pacific. In an environment bristling with danger, they faced the formidable challenge of transporting and maintaining photographic equipment in a tangled, boggy and humid landscape, and shooting in the dim light of the jungle.55 Characterised by their determination to get close to the action, the Australian combat

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55 ‘Until a photographer has tried to work in the jungle’, Damien Parer remarked in September 1943, ‘he can have no idea how greedily the heavy foliage of the tropics eats up light’. As told to A.H. Chisholm, ‘Frontline Cameraman’, *Herald*, 23 September 1943, 7.
cameramen of WWII made a significant contribution to the evolution of the war photographer into the dynamic figure so familiar in the contemporary media landscape—the heroic warrior photojournalist, embedded in the military and dodging the same bullets. The signed photograph of the MHS’s William ‘Harry’ Freeman, bestriding the rubble of Hiroshima with his trusty camera, is palpably grandiloquent—it is almost he who had laid waste to the enemy, and not the atomic bomb (see Figure 3.13). Here, we see the camera’s increasing importance as a destructive tool of war, in a sense complicit in the violence it documents.

This triumphant image also suggests the enduring importance of photography to Australian representation and remembrance of the war against the Japanese. The persistent republication of tendentious official pictures in essentially nationalistic retrospectives of the Pacific War supports a discourse that propagates anachronistic myths of Australian military potency and diminishes the Japanese as degraded as well as defeated. Damien Parer’s staged publicity picture of a dashing digger posing with a Bren machine gun appears in a photomontage on the front cover of Kokoda, produced by the Australian Government in 2012 to mark the seventieth anniversary of the New Guinea campaign. This publication was specifically intended for the teaching of history in Australian secondary schools.

Fiction is being taught as fact.

The strategic public use of photographs perpetuates wartime animosities beyond their historical context. Seventy years after the event, the picture of Len Siffleet’s execution lives on as a memorialised reminder of Australian suffering and Japanese fanaticism. In Canberra’s Australian War Memorial, the photograph is on permanent display in its own glass cabinet right by the entrance to the gallery dedicated to the Australian New Guinea offensives of 1943 and 1944, which helped turn the tide of the Pacific War. The repugnant image of the Japanese executioner is the first thing visitors see, providing a kind of moral as well as circumstantial context for the subduing of the Japanese threat. Moreover, it provides a potent personification of the threat itself. In the age of ISIS terror and

56  Kokoda: Exploring the Second World War Campaign in Papua New Guinea (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia Department of Veterans’ Affairs, 2012). See AWM 013285. McDonald and Brune described the staging of the incident from which this widely circulated photograph was taken, see 200 Shots, 23.
Figure 3.13. Unknown photographer, Portrait of Lieutenant William Harry Freeman, Official photographer, Hiroshima, 1947.

Source: AWM P10753.001.
the digitised mass circulation of gruesome executions and beheadings produced and disseminated by murderous jihadists, it is a highly emotive image. 57

The Japanese character was fixed in the national consciousness for decades by the Australian military photographs taken in the Pacific in the early 1940s. The war remained a constant visual reference point, against which the Japanese people were continually assessed and, as old enmities faded, reassessed and reimagined. The long road to postwar reconciliation was signposted by photography. It began in Japan itself, with the several thousand Australian soldiers—many of them festooned with their cameras, feasting on the foreign spectacle—who journeyed to Japan to participate in a military occupation that lasted longer than the bloody conflict that preceded it.

57 Photograph of execution of Private Reharin, 24 October 1943, AWM 101100.
This text is taken from Pacific Exposures: Photography and the Australia–Japan Relationship, by Melissa Miles and Robin Gerster, published 2018 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.