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DAVID SISSONS AND THE HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA'S WAR CRIMES TRIALS: A SPECTRAL INTERACTION IN THE ARCHIVES

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I never met David Sissons; he died a few years before I began to work on a history of the 300 Australian-run war crimes trials of Japanese suspects in the aftermath of the Pacific War. However, I believe that I have 'met' Sissons in some spectral netherworld where academics engage with each other over the generations. This essay is a study of our interaction, which began in January 2009 and reached its major outcome in 2016 with the publication and dedication to him of the edited volume of essays, *Australia's War Crimes Trials, 1945–51*.¹

In the final throes of submitting my doctoral thesis,² I was interviewed in October 2008 for one of two research fellowships to work on an ARC Linkage project, entitled 'Australia's Post-World War II Crimes Trials of the Japanese: A systematic and comprehensive law reports series'.³ I became the historian on the project, working half time and based at the Australian War Memorial (AWM), Canberra. I was to

1 Georgina Fitzpatrick, Tim McCormack & Narrelle Morris, *Australia's War Crimes Trials, 1945–51* (Brill, 2016). This book was one of three books shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Australian History Award in September 2017.

2 Georgina Fitzpatrick, 'Britishers Behind Barbed Wire: Internment in Australia during the Second World War', PhD thesis, The Australian National University, 2009. This is now available online through the ANU Library at openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/109224.

3 The Linkage project was between the Asia Pacific Centre for Military Law, Melbourne Law School; Defence Legal (the legal arm of the Australian Defence Forces); and the Australian War Memorial (Project LP0882300, 2010–2012 and LP120100204, 2012–2013).

provide the historical context for the main study — a series of law reports on each of the 300 trials. At the first meeting⁴ of the international humanitarian law academics and senior historians behind the project, they decided that the law reports were to be organised by the locations of the trials rather than the nature of the crimes being tried. I was asked to prepare essays on the eight locations — Morotai, Wewak, Labuan, Darwin, Rabaul, Singapore, Hong Kong and Manus Island — to serve as an introduction to each set of law reports.⁵

I put aside a small document I had been drawing up about the issues and types of crimes — this more thematic approach later formed the basis for the published volume of essays — and set to work to survey the existing secondary literature. I soon found that my work would be mostly archival. Very little had been published. Among the few items I found, however, were two succinct essays, one on sources⁶ and one an overview of the trials,⁷ both by someone called David Sissons. What a relief for me. I wasn't alone. And it turned out that he had been an interpreter at some of the Morotai trials in 1946.⁸ As he wrote to one of many participants from whom he sought information: 'My interest in this subject dates from December 1945 when I acted as interpreter for Captain Kato and some of the other accused at the Morotai trials.'⁹ Thus, he combined personal experience with his academic research and analysis. However, his research did not begin in earnest until the trial transcripts were released by the Labor government under Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in the 1970s.¹⁰

Unfortunately, Sissons published very little on Australia's war crimes trials, a research interest of his for some 30 years. Only three pieces of extended writing on the trials were deemed by him to have met his high standards sufficiently for public perusal: the article on sources and the overview essay already mentioned¹¹ and the

4 Held in Melbourne in February 2009.

5 The law reports were assigned to Dr Narrelle Morris, the other research fellow.

6 David Sissons, 'Sources on Australian investigations into Japanese war crimes in the Pacific', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, no. 30, April 1997, www.awm.gov.au/articles/journal/j30.

7 DCS Sissons, *The Australian War Crimes Trials and Investigations (1942–51)*, c. 1997. From 2006, this document wandered around online on different parts of a website hosted by the War Crimes Center at University of California, Berkeley.

8 He is listed as one of the interpreters at three trials at Morotai — M32 (5 February 1946), M29 (6–7 February 1946) and M34 (7 February 1946).

9 National Library of Australia (NLA), Papers of David Sissons, MS 3092, Box 28: Death Sentence. Sissons to Noel A Fowler, 27 June 1978. Fowler was a Medical Officer, responsible for certifying the deaths of some of the war criminals executed by firing squad at Morotai.

10 NLA, MS 3092, Box 30: Hook. Sissons to John Hook, 26 January 1977. These were not of course digitised as they are now. Sissons had to consult the typed transcripts.

11 See notes 6 and 7 above.

various iterations of his entry on 'War crimes trials' for successive editions of the *Australian Encyclopedia*.¹² For all those working on any of the Australian-run trials, these publications may be regarded as the foundational studies.

Sissons' legacy to war crimes trials' researchers also lies in his papers deposited in the National Library of Australia (NLA). Of the 60 archival boxes constituting his manuscript collection, 15 boxes in Series 10, plus a box on the Webb inquiries into war crimes, two boxes on Webb's role at the International Military Tribunal for the Far East and a box on Linguists and the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section (ATIS), are stuffed with his notes, photocopies of sources, his observations and the new materials he himself generated, all organised in a very logical sequence of subject files. I do not believe that other researchers into the Australian war crimes trials have realised what a treasure trove is contained in these 19 boxes. Even Michael Carrel, who had the advantage of preparing his doctoral thesis while Sissons was alive and acknowledged his help, only used copies of such items as Sissons passed on to him.¹³ Whereas anyone looking at my eight 'location' chapters and my 'thematic' chapters on executed airmen, cannibalism and death sentences in *Australia's War Crimes Trials, 1945–51* need only look at my footnotes to see how often I cited a source I had discovered in 'DCS Sissons papers, NLA MS 3092, Box such-and-such'. But let me take you now on the voyage of discovery as the collection revealed itself to me.

From the dates of my notes on his archival boxes, my first foray was within weeks of the start of my appointment.¹⁴ It was decided by Professor Tim McCormack, leader of the project, that the first set of trials to be explored should be those held at Darwin. While Narrelle Morris prepared law reports from the digitised transcripts of the three trials,¹⁵ my chapter on Darwin was to serve as a pilot for my other 'location' essays. Off I went to the NLA to see what Sissons had thought worth pursuing about these three trials.

12 I have not been able to source all the editions but, judging from his 1982 draft for the fourth edition (NLA, MS 3092, Box 3, folder 30A), successive editions grew briefer and briefer, presumably as editors wanted to make space for new entries. I always used the fifth edition, published in 1988, which contained substantially more facts and figures than later versions. The fifth edition included criticisms about the procedures at the trials, which were cut for the next edition published in 1996.

13 Michael Carrel, 'Australia's Prosecution of Japanese War Criminals: Stimuli and constraints', PhD thesis, Faculty of Law, University of Melbourne, 2005. Carrel completed his research before the Sissons papers were open to the public. See my discussion of Carrel's interactions with Sissons below.

14 I began work at the beginning of 2009; my original file of notes using Box 28 dates from 29 January.

15 The transcripts may be found on the website of the National Archives of Australia (NAA). For the three Darwin trials, see NAA, A471, 80708 (Darwin D1), A471, 81630 (Darwin D2) and A471, 80709 (Darwin D3).

Box 1.1. Series 10. Australian War Crimes Trials, 1945–51

The large group of files in this series contain papers relating to Sissons' research into Australian War Crimes Trials. The files are arranged alphabetically, by file title.

- Australian War Crimes Section (Box 20)
- Adachi — Ambon (Box 21)
- Ambon (Box 22)
- Ambon — Bismark Sea (Box 23)
- Borneo (Box 24)
- Burma–Siam Railway (Box 25)
- Bougainville (Box 26)
- 'C' (Box 27)
- 'C' — 'E' (Box 28)
- Finding aids and inventories (Box 29)
- 'G' — Laha (Box 30)
- Manus — Miscellaneous (Box 31)
- Morotai trials — 'P' (Box 32)
- Rabaul trials (Box 33)
- Reconnaissance parties — Wewak trials (Box 34)

Source. Finding aid, Papers of David Sissons, MS 3092, NLA, nla.gov.au/nla.obj-337994618/findingaid

My first task was to work out the right box to order for retrieval. Fortunately, I was to discover that if I thought about what subject heading I would use, I found that Sissons had usually picked the same one. He was so logical in his organisation. That was my first wonderful discovery — that his mind and mine were running along the same lines. He had used a straightforward alphabetical sequence within Series 10. Darwin started with 'D' so I filled in the first of many orders I was to place over the next seven or eight years. I ordered Box 28.

I had been asked to organise my research by posing the question: 'Why were these trials held at X?' I soon found that this was not a question of interest to Sissons. My very own viewpoint! I cannot remember now whether this bonded me to him there and then but I did note two other headings of files in Box 28, 'Cannibalism' and 'Death sentences', as files to be pursued later in my own time. They were just the sorts of themes that interested me; much more than explaining the logistics involved in setting up the trials at the eight locations.¹⁶ However, Sissons did not ignore the location of trials altogether. One of his organising principles for his war crimes files was to use a 'location' heading to gather together information about specific trials that took place at that location and then include lots of cross-referencing to his major files on types of crimes or to places where crimes had been committed or to people who were major suspects. I noted at the time that 'Darwin' was a thin file but Sissons had included notes from what I later discovered was an army investigation

¹⁶ When the project publication changed to a book of essays, I returned to these themes. See my 'Cannibalism and the war crimes trials' and 'Death sentences, Japanese war criminals and the Australian military' in Fitzpatrick, McCormack & Morris, 2016, pp. 291–325 and pp. 326–70 respectively.

file.¹⁷ These notes gave me an outline of the subject matter of one of the Darwin trials, useful at a time when I did not yet have a draft law report to consult. If that had been all one found in a typical Sissons' file, then their usefulness would have been limited. However, there was more.

In this file were some other items of the type I learned were the gold nuggets hidden within all the files of his that I consulted: his extensive additions of archival material he had himself created. In Box 28 were letters to Sissons written in 1987 from a friend who was in touch with one of the Australian officers whose torture was part of the matter tried at Darwin.¹⁸ Because this friend felt at ease with Sissons, he passed on personal observations about the surviving victim, expressing frank views that I am certain I would never have been told had I approached the officer in question.¹⁹ It was the first time I found exchanges of correspondence that Sissons conducted with participants (victims, witnesses, legal officers, interpreters and even accused) most of whom were long dead by the time I began my research. Invaluable sets of letters, dating from the 1970s to the 1990s, offered insights and answers to my questions time and time again as I tunneled through the subject files. Sissons had tracked down and questioned almost every possible person I would have liked to interview but was 30 years too late to do so.

The Darwin file also contained a newspaper clipping illustrated with photos from the Darwin trials, sourced from the AWM.²⁰ This alerted me to the fact that there were official photographers at these war crimes trials and that photographs would constitute a whole set of contemporary materials to study and cross-reference with written materials.²¹ As a consequence of inserting photographs into my draft Darwin chapter,²² showing, for example, the hut interiors where the trials took place, the Australian personnel in situ and the suspects being escorted to the hearings, we included over 100 photographs in *Australia's War Crimes Trials, 1945–51*. It was quite a novelty to have photographic material included in a legal publication.

In his affectionate contribution to the first volume of Sissons' edited writings, *Bridging Australia and Japan*, John Welfield noted Sissons' advice to him about notes. Rather than buying expensive index cards, Sissons suggested he cut recycled

17 NAA, MP742/1, 336/1/1213. This file from the Department of Army files in Melbourne was not one I subsequently read since the logistics and details of the trials were my focus rather than the investigation into the crimes being prosecuted. It later emerged that the original intention of Peter Londey, then at the Military History Section, AWM, and involved in the original submission with McCormack for ARC funding, was that the investigation files held at the AWM would be a main focus of the historian's task. By the time I was employed, however, this seems to have been set aside. It is an aspect of the Australian war crimes apparatus that still awaits its historian.

18 For the trial transcript of D1, see NAA, A471, 80708.

19 I did, however, have a discussion with the officer's son in 2010. His father was alive at that stage but was not willing to talk to me about the events all those years before.

20 F Harari, 'Crime without punishment', *Weekend Australian*, 22–23 May 1993, p. 21.

21 Sissons may not have been aware of this. He annotated the pictures in the news item as being 'claimed' as photos of the Darwin Court and of a group of the accused.

22 The draft chapter with photos was circulated in May 2009 to the participants involved in the project.

scraps of paper into a standard size.²³ I smiled when I saw this practice in action for the first time in Box 28. I was somewhat reminded of thrifty aspects of myself. Sissons also advised Welfield to file the paper scraps in shoeboxes. Although I use index cards for my basic notes, I have always stored them in shoeboxes.²⁴ However I have never seen scraps of recycled paper used to such an extent before. He cut up memos to ANU staff, minutes of meetings and other circulars from the days of the gestetner machine. After discounting the material on the back of his notes as irrelevant, occasionally, I began to roughly date his notes from what appeared there. In Box 28 ('Darwin'), in the first file I consulted, I decided that he must have been working on these particular trials in 1981 because on the back was a dated notice of the closure of a National Archives of Australia (NAA) office. I not only connected to him in terms of admiring the frugality of practice, but also with him over closed NAA offices and over the years separating our time of research. He explored the Darwin trials in 1981. I had returned to them in 2009. I felt we had begun a parallel study.

Another early parcel of research on war crimes trials that I undertook were the two Wewak trials so I ordered Box 34 for 'Wewak trials' consisting mostly of his notes on the trial transcripts and his notes on the personnel of the court. I noted in an email: 'As always I have started with Sissons — this time a very small file but full of goodies. Apart from extensive notes on the letters from Ottaway ... giving me a good idea of the pressure brought on Sturdee to commute the sentence ... Sissons' notes gave me some missing names.'²⁵ Providing first names and enlistment numbers of court members was often something Sissons did for us as we tried to complete the full details of Australian personnel involved in each trial but it is minor compared with so many other contributions his research made to the underpinning of my chapters for *Australia's War Crimes Trials, 1945–51*.

* * *

In the next part of this chapter, I would like to demonstrate the many ways Sissons helped me get my thoughts in order, offered me shortcuts along trails on which he had hacked through the thickets of the thousands of relevant files in the NAA, confirmed some of my tentative hypotheses and, above all, provided me with new sources of evidence he had generated himself. This is the aspect I will first address.

23 John Welfield, 'David Sissons, his methods of supervision and the adventures of one of his students', in Arthur Stockwin & Keiko Tamura (eds), *Bridging Australia and Japan: The writings of David Sissons, historian and political scientist, Volume 1* (ANU Press, 2016), pp. 35–36.

24 I began this practice for my MA research at the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane. The shoeboxes are clearly labelled and proved excellent for stacking in tea chests and removal boxes as I moved from one side of the world to another at least four times between 1971 and 1999. However, the shoeboxes have needed replacing with newer ones.

25 G Fitzpatrick to NE Morris, email, 'Wewak MW1 trial', 21 December 2010.

Archival items generated by Sissons

Apart from getting summaries of the content of thousands of NAA files, a wonderful shortcut for someone given a full-time task but only a half-time job, and cross-referencing to connected files, I also found an extensive collection of interview notes and correspondence with Australian participants (now long dead) such as Herbert Dick,²⁶ Roland Beard,²⁷ Noel Fowler²⁸ and John Williams.²⁹ The first three people in particular gave insights I was able to use in my chapter on death sentences.³⁰ Sissons asked the questions I would like to have asked and, because he could present himself as a fellow participant at the trials, he surely got franker and fuller answers than I would ever have achieved. Even if I interviewed a participant, Sissons had preceded me and often elicited more nuanced observations of the trials and specific aspects. It was so with his correspondence with John Wright whom I interviewed in 2009; too early in my research to ask the right questions.³¹ It was also true of his 1977 correspondence with John Hook, whom I interviewed in old age in 2010.³² Sissons' technique with Hook was to provide a lot of information from the accounts by Lieutenant Katayama Hideo and General Imamura Hitoshi³³ and even translated passages, in particular, where Katayama mentions his contacts with Hook. The effect, of course, was to jog Hook's memory but maybe also to shape it. When I interviewed Hook, he spoke of the contacts with Katayama but as something he had not remembered until Sissons brought it up.

26 Major Herbert Francis Dick was a former prisoner of war, captured at Singapore who, after his liberation, was taken on as a Legal Officer at the Directorate of Prisoners of War and Internees (DPW&I) in Melbourne and 1 Australian War Crimes Section (IAWCS) in Singapore. He later appeared as Defending Officer or Prosecuting Officer at trials held in Rabaul and Hong Kong. His frank correspondence (when a country solicitor) with Sissons in the 1970s gave me many details about the British approach to death sentences (see NLA, MS 3092, Box 22: Ambon: Major Dick).

27 Dr Roland Beard was the Medical Officer (MO) who certified the death of Katayama at Rabaul. See his 1970s correspondence with Sissons: NLA, MS 3092, Box 28: Dr Beard.

28 Noel Fowler was MO at Morotai. One of his responsibilities was to certify that an executed Japanese man was indeed dead. Fowler was the MO at the first firing squad in March 1946. See his 1970s correspondence with Sissons: NLA, MS 3092, Box 28: Death sentence.

29 John Williams was the Prosecuting Officer at Morotai M45. He and Sissons began a correspondence in 1990 about the trial and the related film, *Blood Oath*, which also incorporated some detail from the trial of Katayama (M43), copies of Williams' correspondence with other participants and Williams' MA coursework on the trial (see NLA, MS 3092, Box 21: Ambon).

30 Georgina Fitzpatrick, 'Death sentences, Japanese war criminals and the Australian military', in Fitzpatrick, McCormack & Morris, 2016, pp. 326–70.

31 NLA, MS 3092, Box 32: Morotai: Morotai trials general (excluding Ambon): John Wright. Wright was another interpreter at Morotai with Sissons and they trained together in Melbourne. This correspondence throughout the 1970s contained many frank stories about the death sentences; a subject not touched upon in our interview. Wright died a few months later, before I could return better informed about him and his role.

32 NLA, MS 3092, Box 30 and my interview with John Hook, 11 March 2010.

33 Hideo Katayama, *Ai to shi to eien to: aru senpansha no nikki* (Tokyo, 1958) and Hitoshi Imamura, *Shiki ichi gunjin rokuju-nen no aikan* (Tokyo, 1970). Both books (in Japanese) are held in the NLA.

Another category of participant with whom Sissons corresponded and interviewed was surviving Japanese tried in the Australian courts. In his long search for leads to anyone who had known Katayama,³⁴ he sought an interview with Dr Mukohata Sadami who was a Medical Officer with the 20th Special Sea Service Company and was prosecuted in four trials at Rabaul.³⁵ In January 1979, Sissons, on one of his trips to Japan, interviewed Mukohata about Katayama but also about Australian personnel at the Rabaul and Manus compounds and the conditions there.³⁶ Five days later, he interviewed Takebayashi Tsuruichi and Furuye Eisuke, tried together at Rabaul for the murder of 24 Chinese prisoners of war held captive at Rabaul.³⁷ They served their sentences first at Rabaul (where they overlapped with Katayama) and then the Manus Island War Criminals Compound until repatriated.³⁸ Providing extended eyewitness accounts of life in the two compounds from the other side of the barbed wire to researchers long after the deaths of all concerned is yet another contribution made by Sissons.

Another wonderful discovery for me — a researcher without Japanese language skills³⁹ — was finding his translations from relevant Japanese sources. Apart from many sections of the Katayama diary mentioned already, a major example was his extended translation of an account by Captain Kokaze Ichitano, the Japanese Defending Officer at many of the Rabaul trials.⁴⁰ Although Kokaze's specifics were not quite accurate as he was remembering his experience some years later, it was a fascinating insight into his thoughts about the trials and the procedures and the Australian personnel. One observation by Kokaze confirmed my suspicion that it was probably better for a Japanese defendant to have an Australian Defending Officer, knowledgeable in the procedures and in Australian military law. To have access to a Japanese eyewitness account validated my interpretation on this point

34 Sub Lt Katayama Hideo, tried at Morotai (NAA, A471, 80918) for his role in the execution of a captured airman, was sentenced to death by firing squad on 28 February 1946, but not executed until 23 October 1947 at Rabaul. Sissons' time as an interpreter at Morotai finished two weeks before Katayama arrived there (23 February 1946) (Hank Nelson, 'Blood Oath: A reel history', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 24, no. 97 (October 1991), p. 436). Sissons left Morotai for Japan on 11 February, so he did not witness the Katayama trial nor meet him then or during his earlier investigation employment in the region. For Sissons' service file, see NAA, B883, VX128886.

35 Found not guilty in R157, NAA 471, 81228, Mukohata was sentenced to 15 years in R158 (NAA, A471, 81221), five years in R168 (NAA, 471, 81219) and 25 years in R164 (NAA, 471, 81236). His sentences were served first at Rabaul (where Katayama spent his last months) and then on Manus until remaining war criminals were repatriated and eventually paroled in the 1950s.

36 NLA, MS 3092, Box 31: Manus: Compounds Manus: Correspondence with Dr Sadami Mukohata [sic], Notes of Sissons' interview with Dr Mukohata, 15 January 1979.

37 NLA, MS 3092, Box 31: Manus: Compounds Manus: Notes of Sissons' interview with Takebayashi Tsuruichi and Furuye Eisuke, 20 January 1979, tried together at Rabaul (R55), NAA, A471, 80915.

38 For a study of the repatriation process, see Dean Aszkielowicz, 'Changing direction: repatriation of Japanese war criminals in Australian custody' in Fitzpatrick, McCormack & Morris, 2016, pp. 732–54.

39 This was not required in my part of the project, I was only expected to work through the Australian files.

40 The title was *Shusen zengo to sempan bengo no kaiso* (Tokyo, 1980). See Sissons' translation of pp. 160–82 in NLA, MS 3092, Box 32: Rabaul & NG.

and would have been a closed door to me without the translation.⁴¹ Of necessity, I had to reduce my discussion about the Kokaze account but that translation lies there in Sissons' boxes for other scholars without linguistic skills. What a legacy! Sissons' translations of Japanese publications constitute a major element of the debt I owe him.

Providing me with hard-to-locate sources

Sissons' files contained primary source materials that I would have been unlikely to locate. For example, he had a 1987 newspaper cutting from the *Sun-Herald* (Sydney), a year not digitised in Trove, the online library database hosted by the National Library of Australia, describing how photographs were surreptitiously taken of the execution by firing squad on Changi Beach of Lt Gen. Shimpei Fukuya, Commanding Officer of all prisoner-of-war camps in Malaya (and reproducing the sequence of photographs as well). I noted this item in Sissons' Box 28 but, as the execution was the outcome of a British-run trial, I set it aside. Later, when I was writing my chapter on the trials in Singapore, I realised that this would be relevant in a section concerning the British approach to death sentences there. As was often the case, I went back to his collection, took fuller details about the photos and included a summary in a footnote.⁴²

In his archival boxes, I was always finding a cutting or notes from a newspaper or magazine not yet digitised. How many hours did David Sissons save me from fruitless checking of hard-to-read microfilms to see if a publication contained anything relevant? For example, I would never have found an article from *People* relating the offer from a blind ex-serviceman, who had been a prisoner of war, to act as hangman.⁴³ Another time, finds in another box reduced research time interstate on limited means consulting the papers of Williams.⁴⁴ Sissons had already collected Williams' MA coursework essay and his 'Impromptu address to the cast of *Blood Oath*'. It meant that, before I travelled to Sydney, I had time to digest these interesting items written by one of the prosecuting officers at Ambon and Morotai as he contemplated his role in later years.⁴⁵

41 See my use of this account in Georgina Fitzpatrick, 'The trials in Rabaul' in Fitzpatrick, McCormack & Morris, 2016, pp. 546–47.

42 Georgina Fitzpatrick, 'The trials in Singapore', in Fitzpatrick, McCormack & Morris, 2016, p. 600, note 131, in which I cite my source as NLA, MS 3092, Box 28: Death sentence: Picture of hanging [sic] — a Sissons' title, although the photographs were of an execution by firing squad.

43 NLA, MS 3092, Box 28: Death sentence: People. Having the date and page reference to the article sent me straight to the publication and on a quest for other examples of men volunteering for this task.

44 Williams' papers are held at the Mitchell Library, Sydney, MLMSS 5426.

45 NLA, MS 3092, Box 21: Ambon: Impromptu address to cast of *Blood Oath*, Warner Studios Qld, 12 August 1989; and JM Williams, 'Australian War Crimes Trials 1945–1951: National sentiment, Australian ethos, their historical genesis, and impact on trials', MA Coursework, University of Sydney, November 1988.

Giving me confidence as a novice researcher in this field

At times I felt quite isolated as the historian on this large Linkage project. Although the two existing doctoral theses (by Caroline Pappas and Carrel)⁴⁶ often backed up facts and figures, I was less certain about the way the trials were conducted. Sissons, from beyond the grave, so often seemed to give me a reassuring nod. When I was working on the Singapore trials, I found existing published research confusing. When some assertions about the Singapore trials by Utsumi Aiko and Gavan McCormack⁴⁷ did not match up with what I was finding, I realised that they must have treated the trials by both British and Australians as one set. Whereas my co-researcher, Morris, and I had decided that British trials were those conducted under the Royal Warrant and Australian trials were those conducted under the *War Crimes Act 1945* (Cth).⁴⁸ So no wonder our names, facts and figures were different. Sorting out the two sets of Singapore trials became a major feature of my work for the Singapore chapter and was the subject of a conference paper I delivered in Singapore in 2012.⁴⁹ It was such a relief to have Sissons confirm that there was ‘a division of labour between the British and the Australian war crimes courts in Singapore’. ‘As a result,’ Sissons continued, ‘there were a large number of British trials where the charge included atrocities perpetuated against Australians.’⁵⁰ He identified some of these trials (S1, S15 and others) as *British* trials, just as we had decided, with trial records held by the British in the WO series in the UK National Archives and not in the A471 series in the NAA.

Mentoring from the grave

Several of those who published on the Australian-run war crimes trials leant very heavily on an account by Athol Moffitt of the three trials he prosecuted at Labuan.⁵¹ My instinctive distrust of this approach was confirmed when I read what Sissons had to say about Moffitt’s book, *Project Kingfisher*,⁵² which he had been asked to review for the *Canberra Times*. Sissons made it very clear that it was most unwise to base

46 Caroline Pappas, ‘Law and Politics: Australia’s war crimes trials in the Pacific, 1943–1961’, PhD thesis, University of NSW, 1998; and Carrel, 2005.

47 Utsumi Aiko, ‘Prisoners of war in the Pacific War’ (Gavan McCormack trans.) and Gavan McCormack, ‘Apportioning the blame: Australian trials for railway crimes’, in Gavan McCormack & Hank Nelson (eds), *Burma/Thailand Railway: memory and history* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin), 1993, pp. 68–84 and pp. 85–115 respectively.

48 Exchange of emails between us, 24 August 2011, in possession of this author.

49 Georgina Fitzpatrick, ‘Cutting the apron strings? Australian and British war crimes trials at Singapore’, conference paper, *Legal Histories of the British Empire*, National University of Singapore, July 2012.

50 Sissons to Michael Pigott, AWM, 22 August 1983 in NLA, MS 3092, Box 25: Singapore: British trials.

51 Capt. Athol Moffitt was the Prosecuting Officer at three trials — ML28 (8–20 January 1946), ML36 (23–28 January 1946) and ML35 (30 January 1946). The middle one had to be retried.

52 Athol Moffitt, *Project Kingfisher* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson), 1989.

one's view of the trials through the lens of one man at one place with experience only of three trials. His draft review exposes time after time Moffitt's airy generalisations and errors of fact. Unfazed by the lofty position of Moffitt as a judge in the NSW Supreme Court (1962) and then in the Court of Appeal (1970), Sissons gave his judgement that 'it was sloppily written nonsense delivered with an air of supreme authority'. So much fault did he find with it that he explained to Robert Hefner, literary editor at the *Canberra Times*, that he could not deliver the review as he had found the book 'an awful shock to me'.⁵³

He also gave warning in relation to another book, Ian Ward's *Snaring the Other Tiger*, concerning the last set of trials at Manus Island and, in particular, the trial of Lieutenant General Nishimura Takuma (LN2).⁵⁴ I would not have had the patience he had in analysing the evidence upon which Ward relied — supposedly the investigation reports of Captain James Godwin (some of which were reproduced in the book). Sissons summed up his findings in an unpublished paper, dated 30 January 1997, 'Weekly investigation reports by Godwin reproduced in *Snaring the Other Tiger* — forgeries?'⁵⁵ Sissons compared the files Godwin sent from 2 Australian War Crimes Section (2AWCS) to the DPW&I in Melbourne⁵⁶ with the reproductions in the Ward book. He compared abbreviations (different). He compared typeface (different) and the typewriter codes used on the originals (absent on the reproduced ones). I do not know why he bothered with the question mark in his title. As established by two later researchers, Gregory Hadley and James Oglethorpe, the forgeries were not the fault of Godwin but the concoction of the late James Mackay.⁵⁷ Ward had assumed the 'Godwin' weekly reports, supposedly collected in a 'File 125M' and discussed by Mackay in his book⁵⁸ were the genuine ones. When I was given a copy of Ward's book at the AWM, it came with a verbal warning about the forged bits of evidence. Hadley and Oglethorpe acknowledged their debt too to Sissons ('respected Australian historian') in an endnote. He had sent them his unpublished paper⁵⁹ and it seems to have inspired their work on the typewriters and formatting used and other details.

53 NLA, MS 3092, Box 23: Borneo: *Canberra Times*, Sissons to Mr Heffner, 5 March 1991. The draft review is in this box too. For a list of errors made by Moffitt, especially in his Chapter 8, see 'Moffitt errors' in same box. In correspondence with Williams (Prosecuting Officer for M45 at Ambon and Morotai), Sissons was explicit that his reason for not producing the review for publication was that he could only see its faults (NLA, MS 3092, Box 21: Ambon, Sissons to Williams, 15 August 1991).

54 Ian Ward, *Snaring the Other Tiger* (Singapore, 1996).

55 NLA, MS 3092, Box 31: Manus.

56 NAA, MP742/1, 336/1/1965 PART 1.

57 Gregory Hadley & James Oglethorpe, 'Mackay's betrayal: Solving the mystery of the "Sado Island prisoner-of-war massacre"', *Journal of Military History*, vol. 71, no. 2 (April 2007), pp. 441–64.

58 James Mackay, *Betrayal in High Places* (Stockport, UK, 1996).

59 'First revealed by respected Australian historian David Sissons ... unpublished manuscript [PDF] in D.C.S. possession, 1997' (Hadley & Oglethorpe, 2007, n. 32). This was, of course, before Sissons deposited his archives in the NLA. I have since seen correspondence between Sissons and Oglethorpe enclosing his unpublished paper in a file of materials that Sissons passed on to Carrel.

Sissons in the last years of his life was also mentoring Carrel, as I discovered from Carrel's research files. While I was at the AWM working on my chapters for *Australia's War Crimes Trials, 1945–51*, Carrel, on the eve of moving to Britain, passed on to me his files accumulated from his doctoral thesis (filling one four-drawer cabinet).⁶⁰ Among them was a manila folder of Sissons' writings and some correspondence between them. It was another pathway for me, via Carrel, to the thoughts and unpublished writings of Sissons. Even more importantly, Sissons had provided Carrel and, subsequently, me with a database of records organised alphabetically by the Japanese surnames of defendants. Carrel entered all this information from a typescript that Sissons gave him into an Excel database, which was much easier for me to search, but it had started with Sissons.⁶¹

The designated legatee or the ventriloquist's dummy

As I progressed with my use of Sissons' archival boxes, I began to feel that he had organised his materials specifically for me.⁶² This emerged in his cross-referencing. In his box on Japanese language and linguists in Australia, for example, I read this command from him (concerning the recruitment of four ethnic Chinese skilled in the Japanese language) on one of his cut-down notes: 'Suggest that A71 may lead to them under EVACUATION or NON-EURO & RESTRICTED: WARTIME ARRIVAL. DCSS 6/10/87'. There he was, in 1987, realising that he might not be able to follow every thread and that I, his inheritor in this area of his research, should be guided posthumously from the grave to the right file.⁶³

On another occasion, when I began research on the trials held at Singapore, many of them concerning the treatment of prisoners of war along the Burma–Thai railway, I came across another suggestion. Sissons had annotated photocopies of chapters by Utsumi Aiko and Gavin McCormack⁶⁴ with the following: 'It would be interesting to look at the investigation files and see why more officers and railways personnel were not charged. See how many railway officers were proscribed in the Aust

60 See n. 13. Carrel's files were mostly printouts or photocopies and transcripts of NAA files, organised by file number and not by subject. If it was obvious from his thesis that a file would be relevant for a particular aspect, I would check his file before heading off to the archives to fill in any gaps. Carrel, as well as Sissons, by his generous sharing of his files with me ensured that I could trawl through hundreds of thousands of NAA files in the time allocated to me.

61 Michael Carrel, 'Defendants', Excel database, in my possession. Carrel also passed on to me his file entitled 'Sissons documents', including an appendix to the draft guide for the NAA, which Sissons had decided not to proceed with. The appendix was entitled 'War criminals tried by Australian courts: Index to court transcripts & Dept of Army records by name of accused'. This is also now in my possession.

62 I was told by one of the librarians that he had been working on the arrangement in the manuscript room even in his last weeks of life.

63 NLA, MS 3092, Box 39, File: T.S. Lim (and ex-Malayan Special Branch evacuees).

64 See n. 47.

questionnaires and how many were placed on Aust wanted lists.⁶⁵ I considered this suggestion for a moment and then typed my response: 'I feel he is speaking to me from the grave but for me to explore at that depth would be fatal. I too would not complete my task.'⁶⁶ One thing I had learnt from Sissons (as a negative example) was to know when to stop: when to limit oneself within boundaries and leave an aspect of the immense war crimes trials research for another day or for another researcher.

Identifying with Sissons the researcher

At times, I identified with Sissons in certain of his obsessions. For example, some people thought there was something distasteful in my wanting to explore the mechanics of how the Australian military organised the hangings and firing squads required for death sentences. All that I needed to do to set aside any concerns that I was somehow twisted, however, was to remember Sissons' own pursuit of the smallest details on the same subject. He collected NAA material as well as items from obscure or non-digitised publications.⁶⁷ One 1987 interview with Harry Morris, the senior official in charge of the Department of Works and Housing on Manus Island during the period of the war crimes trials there, prompted Sissons to draft a few pages of rebuttal.⁶⁸ It was clear that Sissons was also intrigued by the question of who acted as hangman on Manus and at Rabaul. In his transcriptions of instructions to those who had to carry out the firing squads or organise the hangings, he alerted me to material I might not have judged significant.⁶⁹

Apart from discovering that I shared many methods and practices in archival research with Sissons, I also wryly grimaced in sympathy at times. When he was delving deeply into death sentences and attempting to pin down which military tradition — British, American or Canadian — had been the source for Australia's procedure, he wrote to the old Public Record Office (PRO) in London, forerunner of the UK National Archives in Kew. In a letter of 1975, at a time when I was spending months commuting from Cambridge to Chancery Lane to work on my MA research, he

65 His emphasis. NLA, MS 3092, Box 24: Burma–Siam: Korean WCs.

66 Unfortunately I have not dated this transcript of mine on the paper version as usual but it would have been in late 2011 when I was working on the Singapore trials. Interestingly, at a meeting in May 2009, I discovered from Peter Londey that the initial intention of AWM staff involved in mapping out the Linkage proposal was to extend the existing research work by Pappas and Carrel in their respective theses (see n. 46) to the investigation files held in the AWM. This was not the path chosen but it is still a good idea for future research.

67 These included a report from someone who had witnessed the Manus hangings the day before and who had identified the hangman (*South Pacific Post*, 15 June 1951).

68 NLA, MS 3092, Box 31: Manus: H. Morris's recollections of the Tol Massacre and the Manus trials'. Morris was on the interviewing committee on Manus when the hangman was chosen from several volunteers. For the original item, see 'War veteran pleads for end to Nazi hunt' (*Age*, 13 March 1987), in the same box. On the Manus hangings, see Fitzpatrick, 'Death sentences', 2016, pp. 360–69.

69 His transcription of a 'Memo upon execution of prisoners by hanging with the long drop' included the information that the Melbourne file had diagrams in the instructions (NLA, MS 3092, Box 28: Death sentence).

asked for information about British policy and requested a copy of standing orders. In a typically curt reply, someone told him to get a professional researcher. That was the PRO as I remembered it! The staff at Chancery Lane was notorious in the 1970s for rudeness and general obstructiveness. Those on the desk got quite cranky and truculent when you approached them with your orders for files. After a gap of many years, I returned to the new premises at Kew and I could not get over the contrast. I think staff had been sent to charm school or, at least, recognised that they were the front face of a public service and that researchers had legitimate requests.⁷⁰

Glimpses of his viewpoint

Sissons' file headings were usually placenames, events, people's names or statements of fact, but occasionally the headings expressed his concerns. One example, occurring in his box of Ambon materials, was headed: 'Subordinates should not be tried until after Seniors'.⁷¹ Another folder was labelled: 'Katayama beaten up at Rabaul'. It became obvious that he was very troubled by the Katayama case as he followed up every trail to anyone who had known Katayama on Morotai and the Rabaul War Criminals Compound. In a letter to Herbert Dick, he wrote:

At the time I was quite sure that the trials were a necessity and that as a result of them prisoners and civilians were more likely in future wars to be treated with humanity. I thought, however, that some of the Morotai courts were unduly severe in imposing the death penalty on very junior officers and other ranks who had carried out death sentences as a result of specific orders from superior officers and had not aggravated the offence by additional barbarities or indignities.⁷²

His concerns seemed to widen out from the Katayama case to the whole process. The clearest statement I found came in his letter applying to present a paper to the 1975 Australian and New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS) conference. He set out his doubts about the trials, including the speed of the trials and the short time the defending counsel had with their clients. He also pointed out that the legal officers had inadequate legal reference books. It worried him that the delegation to confirm sentences fell to a single military officer rather than the Governor-General.⁷³ He also found fault with the failure to ensure conformity in sentencing. As had happened to Katayama, subalterns tried in January

⁷⁰ The exchange of letters may be found in NLA, MS 3092, Box 28: Death sentence: British Army. Sissons to PRO, 18 September 1975 and the reply.

⁷¹ NLA, MS 3092, Box 22: Ambon.

⁷² NLA, MS 3092, Box 22: Ambon: Major Dick. Sissons to Dick, 5 August 1976. This is a typescript letter of six pages.

⁷³ Initially this was the Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Army, Lt Gen. Vernon Sturdee. In 1947, confirming power was transferred to the Adjutant-General Maj. Gen. WM Anderson (Pappas, 1998, p. 71).

and February 1946 got tougher sentences than their commanding officers tried later on. He also pointed to the failure of the Australian authorities in investigating cases of ill-treatment of Japanese prisoners of war.⁷⁴

These were good points that he made and I looked out for evidence in relation to them, making sure I included sections in my chapters at the relevant points. However, I do wish that he had expressed his opinions more fully towards the end of his life, when, for example, he wrote the overview essay.⁷⁵ Or better still, I wish that I had been able to discuss my overview essay with him in which I finally concluded that, in the context of the time, the trials made a determined effort to be fair.⁷⁶

Why did he publish so little on the Australian war crimes trials?

Early in my research, when I was exploring Sissons' Morotai files, I came across an envelope marked 'Duntroon lecture'. Inside were notes and the draft of a lecture to be given at the Royal Military College, Duntroon. The few typescript pages of the lecture gave me an inkling of his perfectionism and filled me with a sympathetic horror. Almost every word was crossed out (including 'the' and 'and') in black pen with alternative words supplied. In turn, some of the alternatives were scored through.⁷⁷ If his writing was always as hard-wrung from him as this example showed, then his publishing record in this area has an explanation.

His research on the war crimes trials also lasted over decades — from the 1970s to the 2000s. There must come a point at which one is sick of it. Certainly, his focus changed over the years, judging from hints he gave in correspondence. In an early letter in the archive, he described himself as writing a biography of Sub Lieutenant Katayama Hideo.⁷⁸ By 1982, he was describing his work on Katayama as an article.⁷⁹ However, the amount of detail collected by Sissons by that stage may have overwhelmed him. There seemed no avenue he failed to explore.

74 NLA, MS 3092, Box 32: Morotai trials: ANZAAS. Sissons letter, 19 June 1975. I do not know whether he presented such a paper. I have not found a draft.

75 See n. 7.

76 Georgina Fitzpatrick, 'War crimes trials, "victor's justice" and Australian military justice in the aftermath of the Second World War', in Kevin Jon Heller & Gerry Simpson (eds), *The Hidden Histories of War Crimes Trials*, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 327–47.

77 NLA, MS 3092, Box 32: Morotai trials: Duntroon lecture. In my notes from this box which I worked through in October 2009, I wrote: 'I should read this first for an overview. But it is hard to use as it doesn't have footnotes and it has lots crossed out.' In the end, I did not return to it until transcribing it recently for this volume.

78 NLA, MS 3092, Box 28: Death sentence: British Army. Sissons to CM McDougall, 7 April 1975; CM McDougall to Sissons, 7 April 1975.

79 NLA, MS 3092, Box 31: Manus; Correspondence with Dr Sadami Mukohata 1979–82. Sissons to Mukohata, 23 December 1982. For information about Dr Mukohata, see above n. 35.

Katayama received the death sentence; the aspect of his case that Sissons was investigating in 1975. As I found in 2009, when I began to look for material on this aspect of the war crimes trials, there was very little in the public domain about the mechanics of conducting executions. Sissons came across a novel by Colin McDougall⁸⁰ containing a description of a firing squad that he believed was based on the British Army standing orders. McDougall was a lieutenant colonel in the Canadian infantry during the Second World War. Sissons tracked him down to the University Secretariat at McGill University and wrote to him for information. McDougall replied that he did not know if the procedure described in his novel followed British Army standing orders. So of course, Sissons wrote another letter, the one to the PRO discussed above, mentioning McDougall and his novel and requesting the British standing orders.⁸¹ In this episode, I observed the extent to which he would follow a trail.

He collected so much material that at some stage he must have realised that he had the makings of a general book on the trials. The focus was still Katayama's case but it snowballed to address many other aspects. As time went on and the folders and envelopes of notes accumulated, he may have been overwhelmed by the scale and complexity of what he had gathered. And the same problem may have applied to the 'Research guide to war crimes trials' that he was preparing for the NAA.⁸²

Conclusion

Although Sissons published very little about the war crimes trials in which he pulled together all the source material he had collected and set out his opinions and findings, combining his academic training with his personal experience as a participant in some of the trials — and that is a terrible pity — he still left behind a treasure trove in his boxes of archival material. It helped to live in Canberra, as I did, and could set aside days and weeks to work through his boxes, but perseverance will repay the excavation.

I acknowledged my debt to Sissons in the dedication of the co-authored book *Australia's War Crimes Trials, 1945–51* in the following words: 'Dedicated to the memory of David Sissons upon whose shoulders all who research Australia's war crimes trials stand.' However, writing this chapter and going through my notes and thought processes again has made me realise that his legacy was not just our private two-way spectral conversation. If this chapter makes more historians realise the buried treasure lying in his archival boxes, then perhaps my debt will have been paid.

80 Colin McDougall, *Execution*, Macmillan, 1958.

81 See n. 69.

82 NLA, MS 3092, Box 2: File 25: Australian Archives Guide 9.

DAVID SISSONS' WARTIME SERVICE

Note by Georgina Fitzpatrick

David Sissons combined his later academic interest in Australia's war crimes trials, 1945–51, with personal experience as an interpreter at three of the Morotai trials in early 1946 before his transfer to Japan as a member of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF).

He was a student at the University of Melbourne studying the Classics when he was called up six months after his 18th birthday and 'taken on strength' at Royal Park near the university campus on 26 June 1944.¹ A few days later, he went (or 'marched out') to a training course in New South Wales. In the army parlance of the time, the course was noted as 'Jap class'. It must have been during this period that, according to family information, he was present at Cowra on 5 August 1944 during the mass breakout of Japanese prisoners in which 231 Japanese died. This, however, is not mentioned in his service file. The official transfer to the AIF and the allocation of his VX number occurred in September. For the next two-and-a-half years, he belonged to them, setting aside his university education.

During 1944–45, he was one of the students at the intensive course offered at the Military Intelligence and Censorship School in the Olderfleet Building, Collins Street, Melbourne.² His first posting was to No. 4 Internment Compound at Tatura in northern Victoria between 28 March and 14 April 1945. This was the Japanese Compound. Unfortunately, his dossier does not detail his task at the camp, but this compound held Japanese civilian internees including Australian-born people with some Japanese descent and the odd Australian of Anglo-Celtic ethnicity who was

1 See his completed Attestation form in his Service File, NAA, B883, VX128886.

2 He is listed in Colin Funch, *Linguists in Uniform: The Japanese Experience* (Clayton, Vic.: Japanese Studies Centre, 2003), p. 284.

suspected of pro-Japanese sympathies.³ He was then sent to the Cowra prisoner-of-war camp in New South Wales. Once more there is no detail on his role there or even how long his deployment lasted.⁴

As soon as the war ended, thousands of Japanese surrendered to the Australian forces on islands to the north of Australia.⁵ As a member of the Allied Translator and Interpreter Section (ATIS), Sissons was attached to the headquarters of 9th Division AIF at Morotai, arriving by plane on 17 September. He was promoted to corporal a week later. Soon after, he was sent to Labuan, an island off the coast of British North Borneo. His two months there must have been confronting. Although his service file does not specify his work, investigators such as Captain Davern Wright (with whom he corresponded in later years) were interrogating war criminal suspects about the Sandakan–Ranau death marches across Borneo, the conditions at the Sandakan and Kuching prisoner-of-war camps and the treatment of Allied prisoners used as forced labour on the island. It is quite likely he was employed translating captured documents or statements taken from suspects. His kindness to a Japanese suspect, ‘Nakase’, during this time on Labuan was remembered later in a letter Nakase sent to a fellow interpreter, Allan Clifton.⁶ Although Sissons was not an interpreter at the subsequent set of 16 Australian-run trials on the island he may well have attended the first three trials held between 3–8 December 1945.⁷ He did not leave Labuan until 13 December (on the *AS Merriman*).

Soon after his return to Morotai, he was promoted to sergeant. Although his service file consistently lacks detail about what he did at Morotai, the war crimes trial transcripts reveal that he interpreted at three of the trials held in early February 1946.⁸ All three cases concerned the mistreatment or killing of captured Australian airmen and, in all three cases, he interpreted for the defence. Unfortunately, apart

3 See my accounts of Veronica Connelly and Harry Woodfield interned in Tatura 4, in Georgina Fitzpatrick, ‘Britishers Behind Barbed Wire: Internment in Australia during the Second World War’, PhD thesis, The Australian National University, 2009. This is now available online through the ANU Library at openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/handle/1885/109224.

4 For the dates and places of his postings to Tatura and Cowra (and his subsequent movements), see his Service and Casualty form, NAA, B883, VX128886.

5 For an account of the role of linguists during this period, see Georgina Fitzpatrick, ‘Interpreters at Australia’s war crimes trials, 1945–51: From “ready-mades” to “happenchancers”’, in Amanda Laugesen & Richard Gehrman (eds), *Communication, Interpreting and Language in Wartime: Historical and Contemporary Aspects* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 2019, pp. 153–70.

6 ‘Nakase’ wrote that he had looked for familiar faces among the Australian troops with BCOF on his return to Japan, including ‘Sergeant Sissons, who had been so kind to me on Labuan’. See the letter, transcribed in Allan S Clifton, *Time of Fallen Blossoms* (Sydney: Cassell, 1960), p. 56.

7 ML2, ML3 and ML4. For an account of the Labuan trials, see Georgina Fitzpatrick, ‘The trials on Labuan’, in Fitzpatrick, McCormack & Morris, 2016, pp. 429–70.

8 He is listed as one of the two interpreters at three trials at Morotai — M32 (5 February 1946), M29 (6–7 February 1946) and M34 (7 February 1946). He also mentioned interpreting for Captain Katō Kihachirō in a letter to Noel Fowler, 27 June 1978, NLA, Papers of David Sissons, MS 3092, Box 28: Death sentence. This could be either during the investigation period or Katō’s trial (M23) held on 14 January 1946. Unfortunately, no interpreter is named in the listing of court personnel for M23, NAA, A471, 80774, p. 10.

from the occasional placing of himself at a specific trial in his archive,⁹ Sissons, to my knowledge, did not leave a firsthand account of his experiences. However, at the trials of Captain Murakami Hiroshi (M34) and Sergeant Morimoto Kiyomitsu (M32), Sissons, as interpreter for the defence, would have interpreted any cross-examinations of Japanese witnesses conducted by the Australian Defending Officer and the latter's examination of the accused.¹⁰ In the trial of Corporal Baba Hidetoshi (M29), there is even a glimpse of Sissons, when the Defending Officer, Captain Philip Allen, asked the Court's permission 'to explain through my Interpreter the Accused's rights'. The transcript then noted that the accused and the accused's interpreter retired 'temporarily', and that '[l]ater they return[ed] to Court.'¹¹ Alas, no official photographer captured that consultation, as happened in the very earliest of the Morotai trials when the novelty of the events prompted a visual record to be made.

Some of the men with whom he later corresponded about the trials were there at Morotai at the same time, appearing in various roles at either the mass trial about conditions at the Tan Toey prisoner-of-war camp (M45) or a related trial (M44). These trials overlapped with those he worked on. Among them was the Prosecuting Officer, Captain John Williams (M45); and from M44, Captain Leo Travers, a member of the Court, and Staff Sergeant John Wright (the interpreter).¹²

On 11 February 1946, he embarked by plane for Japan where he spent the next year with BCOF. He returned to Australia on the *Manoora*, embarking at Kure on 15 February 1947. In his service file, a typed slip of paper, signed by Captain FL Gower, Acting Officer Commanding CSDIC, BCOF, vouched for him as an 'Excellent Translator/Interpreter. Often left to work on his own and produced good results. Conduct excellent. Would make a good Linguist Officer'. However, Sissons did not apply to be an officer. He was discharged from military service to resume his university studies in Melbourne. In his service file, it is noted that he had spent 532 days overseas and only 450 in Australia.¹³ These wartime years set his path towards his lifetime research interest into all matters involving Australian–Japanese relations.

9 For example, he noted his role as defence interpreter at M34 in his materials on that trial (NLA, Papers of David Sissons, MS 3092, Box 32: N. Celebes and Halmaheras).

10 For the trial transcript of M34, see NAA, A471, 80788 and for M32, see NAA, A471, 80722.

11 Trial transcript of M29, NAA, A471, 81059, p. 17.

12 For his correspondence with Williams, see NLA, Papers of David Sissons, MS 3092, Box 21: Ambon; for John Wright, see NLA, Papers of David Sissons, MS 3092, Box 32: Morotai trials: John Wright; and for Leo Travers, see NLA, Papers of David Sissons, MS 3092, Box 21.

13 See Proceedings for Discharge, NAA, B883, VX128886.

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