

Part I: The Australians

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The Pacific War created an unprecedented opportunity for Australia's anthropologists. Before 1939, anthropology in Australia was dominated by Adolphus Peter Elkin, the country's only professor in the subject, at the University of Sydney, and Chairman of the Australian National Research Council (ANRC)¹ committee for anthropology, which oversaw anthropological research in Australia and Melanesia. Elkin's department exercised a key role in training administrators and missionaries for Australia's overseas territories, which reflected the cardinal justification of anthropology in assisting colonial administrations in their control and development of indigenous peoples. The war wrought key changes in his position and in the discipline over which he ruled. From 1942 onwards, war-born organisations such as the Australian Army's Directorate of Research and, from October 1944, the Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs (DORCA; including the School of Civil Affairs established in December 1944) began to recruit anthropologists, which challenged Elkin's university monopoly on research and training, and placed them in a challenging cross-disciplinary environment that also included economists, geographers and legal experts.

The day after Australia declared war against Germany, in a reply to a request from the Manpower Committee of the Department of Defence, Elkin compiled on behalf of the ANRC a list of anthropologists in Australia.² It is unclear why this information was sought other than seeking to assemble a list of scientists and their fields of expertise for use in the war effort.³ It was an extensive list; included were anatomists, physical anthropologists, physiologists and psychologists, archaeologists and social anthropologists. The list illustrates not only the paucity of positions, but also the elasticity of professional definitions. Notwithstanding only a few on the list were used in war work.

Of the anthropologists listed, only Elkin and H. I. Hogbin—both at the University of Sydney—had permanent positions in the discipline. Included

1 The ANRC was formed in 1919 as a representative body of the most eminent scientists in Australia. Among its many functions was to provide advice to government on scientific matters. It was disbanded in 1955 and replaced with the Australian Academy of Science. See A. P. Elkin, 'The Australian National Research Council', *Australian Journal of Science*, 16:6 (1954), pp. 203–11.

2 Elkin to A. B. Walkom, Hon. Sec., ANRC, 4 September 1939, EP, 156/4/1/14. See also Geoffrey Gray, 'Managing the Impact of War: Australian anthropology and the South West Pacific', in Roy M. MacLeod (ed.), *Science and the Pacific War: Science and survival in the Pacific, 1939–1945* (Dordrecht, 2000), pp. 187–210.

3 Michelle Freeman, 'Australian Universities at War: The mobilization of universities in the battle for the Pacific', in MacLeod, *Science and the Pacific War*, pp. 119–38.

also were those who were anthropologically trained such as the NT Director of the Native Affairs Branch and Advisor to the Commonwealth Government on Native Affairs, E. W. P. Chinnery, who assisted the Far Eastern Liaison Office (FELO). The educationalist and anthropologist W. C. Groves and Australia Museum curator Fred McCarthy were coopted into the Australian Army Education Service where they produced booklets and pamphlets for the use of soldiers fighting at the frontline. The Papuan Government Anthropologist, F. E. Williams, who was with the Allied Geographic Unit, was killed in an air crash in March 1943.⁴ Camilla Wedgwood, who had not worked as an anthropologist since 1936, was Principal of Women's College at the University of Sydney. Elkin excluded anthropologists such as W. E. H. Stanner, Ralph Piddington and Donald Thomson who were overseas.⁵ Although not on Elkin's list, these three men went on to make significant contributions to Australia's war effort.⁶

At the outbreak of war, Stanner was in East Africa undertaking research for Oxford University, Thomson was completing a PhD at Cambridge (and returned to Australia via America) and Ralph Piddington was lecturing at the University of Aberdeen; each made his way back to Australia to play a part in the war effort. With the exception of Thomson, who was attached to the Merauke (West Papua) Force of the Australian Army, no anthropologists were engaged in overseas combat duty. Stanner was commander of a mobile coastal-watching force in northern Australia—the North Australia Observer Unit—and acted as an advisor on colonial policy and civil affairs. He was appointed to the Australian Army's Directorate of Research in October 1944, where he joined the anthropologists Hogbin and Wedgwood. Piddington, who had enlisted in the British Army's psychology unit, was brought out at the end of 1944 to be Deputy Principal of the School of Civil Affairs.⁷ Members of the directorate took short trips to Papua New Guinea, although both Hogbin and Wedgwood undertook extensive research as the war drew to a close. Most members of the directorate, however, remained in Australia at Land Army Headquarters (LHQ), Victoria Barracks, Melbourne.

In New Zealand the situation for anthropologists was somewhat different. Individual examples demonstrate. The New Zealand (and now Canadian) anthropologist Cyril Belshaw (b. 1921) commented that 'volunteering to join the

4 A. P. Elkin, 'A. R. Radcliffe-Brown, 1880–1955', *Oceania*, 26:1 (1956), pp. 239–51.

5 See Gray, 'Managing the Impact of War', pp. 187–9.

6 D. J. Mulvaney (ed.), 'Donald Thomson's Report on the Northern Territory Coastal Patrol and the Special Reconnaissance Unit 1941–3', *Aboriginal History*, 16:1 (1992), pp. 1–57.

7 The linguist and self-made anthropologist T. G. H. Strehlow lectured at the School of Civil Affairs: 'I was in charge of army cadets destined for service in New Guinea, and my knowledge of Aborigines was supposed to serve as a platform between the cadets and their relationship with the New Guinea natives... When I pointed out that there was really no similarity between the two peoples, I was told to teach the cadets the best I could to get along with the natives. There was some very woolly-headed thinking among army top-brass, I soon learnt.' Quoted in Ward McNally, *Aborigines, Artefacts and Anguish* (Adelaide, 1981), p. 73.

British Solomon Islands Defence Force...was probably the best career decision I have ever made'. It enabled him to accept an offer from the Institute of Pacific Relations to take a survey of colonial government and reconstruction in New Caledonia, New Hebrides and the British Solomon Islands, which resulted in *Island Administration in the South West Pacific* (1950). His father, an economics professor in New Zealand, was a friend of W. L. Holland, Director of the Institute of Pacific Relations in New York, and this association was to Cyril's benefit. When Belshaw arrived at the London School of Economics (LSE) to undertake doctoral studies, Raymond Firth 'was of the opinion that my life in the Solomons gave me a sense of the reality in the field'. His wartime work acted as a substitute of sorts for fieldwork; Belshaw completed a library thesis.⁸ It was a similar case for W. R. Geddes (1916–89), who put H. D. Skinner's one-year anthropology course at Otago University to good use during his service (1941–45) in the 2nd New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Rising to staff sergeant, he spent most of his time in Fiji. This experience was the basis for his Polynesian Society memoir, *Deuba: A study of a Fijian village* (1945), written during the Bougainville campaign, and his University of London (PhD, 1948) thesis, 'An Analysis of Cultural Change in Fiji', written at the LSE. In 1947–48, he lectured in psychology at Birkbeck College, University of London, and returned to Auckland in 1951 as a lecturer in anthropology at Auckland University College, rising to Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney in 1958.

Such a direct impact on a career is not so obvious for Australian social scientists discussed in this volume other than Ronald M. Berndt (b. 1916) who was not called up for military service. He was fortunate as it gave him time to develop as an anthropologist; he focused on field research, most of which had little to do with the Australian war effort although it was presented as such to government authorities. The careers of Hogbin and Wedgwood were unimpeded by the war although in Wedgwood's case she shifted from being Principal of Women's College at the University of Sydney to taking a more active teaching role at the Australian School of Pacific Administration (ASOPA). Hogbin briefly toyed with the idea of an appointment to ASOPA but decided to remain at the University of Sydney. The periods during the war and post war were highpoints in Hogbin's career as an applied anthropologist: he advised both the Minister for (Eddie Ward) and the Administrator of Papua and New Guinea (J. K. Murray) on policy and its implementation (not forgetting his work for the British Solomon Islands Protectorate in 1943). By 1950, however, he withdrew from policy work and advice and no longer undertook field research, concentrating on teaching, writing and university politics. Stanner looked upon his war years as 'wasted years', and struggled after the war to find himself a permanent position in

8 Cyril Belshaw, *Bumps on a Long Road* (Self-published: <www.lulu.com>, 2009), pp. 31, 54–8. The thesis was published as *The Great Village: The economic and social welfare of Hanubada, an urban community in Papua* (London, 1957).

colonial administration or the academy. He obtained a position as director at Makerere University College but resigned a year into his appointment. He was offered the Chair of Anthropology at Auckland University College, which he rejected in favour of a readership at the recently established Australian National University (ANU) in Canberra.⁹ John Legge, the most junior member of this group, provides a personal account of his war work, especially with the Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs, and how that influenced his interest in Pacific history. He went on to a distinguished career, having made a switch to South-East Asian history.

Elkin responded to the necessities of war work with patriotic duty and fervour.¹⁰ His biographer, Tigger Wise, writes that he ‘threw himself into an almost jingoistic campaign to whip up the Australian war effort’. He made a statement in his 1940 presidential address to the Royal Society of New South Wales that highlighted the role of scientists ‘as citizens to do their utmost to press their knowledge on both government and people...we should not sit aloof adopting the attitude that if the country does not want our knowledge or help it can leave it’. Elkin subsequently devoted himself to ‘a four year campaign of patriotic speeches, surveys, questionnaires and the pressing of unsolicited advice on the government and the public’.¹¹

Australian social scientists were utilised, by and large, during the war as experts in their field but for an agenda outside their choosing and control. John R. Kerr, second-in-command to Conlon, lamented that ‘[t]he war of course interrupted most people in their chosen course, and Conlon had interfered with my plans to return to the Bar’.¹²

Many of the individual experiences of Australian scholars were linked through the energy and vision (and charisma) of Alfred Austin Conlon (1908–61) who recruited most of them initially to a research section in the Australian Army, expanding later into the Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs, which was located at Victoria Barracks, Melbourne.¹³ It never had a war establishment or a war diary. H. G. Conde, Chairman of the Army’s Establishment Investigating Committee in November 1945, observed that ‘appointments had been made individually. In this respect it is...quite the exception to any other Army organisation’.¹⁴ Conlon, an extraordinary and singular individual described by Kerr as ‘a psychological magician’, oversaw much of the work undertaken

9 See chapters on Hogbin and Stanner in this volume.

10 See Pomeroy, in this volume; Gray, ‘Managing the Impact of War’, pp. 187–210.

11 Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, p. 147; see also Geoffrey Gray, ‘“The army requires anthropologists”: Australian anthropologists at war, 1939–1946’, *Australian Historical Studies*, 37:127 (2006), pp. 156–80.

12 John Kerr, *Matters for Judgment: An autobiography* (Melbourne, 1978), p. 110.

13 Geoffrey Gray, ‘Australian Anthropologists and WWII’, *Anthropology Today*, 21:3 (2005), pp. 18–21; Gray, ‘“The army requires anthropologists”’, pp. 156–80.

14 Conde to Minister for the Army, 14 November 1945, National Archives of Australia, MP 742/1, 240/1/2267.

by members of the directorate.¹⁵ Dorothy Shineberg, who joined ASOPA as a twenty-year-old lecturer in 1947, comments that 'Alf's greatest gift was that of making one feel important'.¹⁶ Conlon assembled around him an exceptional group of talented people, among them the future judge and Governor-General (Sir) John Kerr, the diplomat (Sir) James Plimsoll, the poets James McAuley and Harold Stewart, and the famed Mitchell librarian Ida Leeson.¹⁷ And some lifelong friendships—such as the Professor of Jurisprudence and International Law at the University of Sydney, Julius Stone, and R. D. ('Panz') Wright, Professor of Physiology at the University of Melbourne—developed during these years.¹⁸ In late 1944, Conlon arranged for the British colonial administration specialist Lucy Mair to lecture on colonial administration at the School of Civil Affairs and prepare a report. She wrote that her lectures were to 'show the problems of New Guinea are those which every colonial administration has to face, and to indicate what experience elsewhere could contribute to their solution'. The research she conducted for these lectures formed the groundwork for her report, published as *Australia in New Guinea* (1948).¹⁹ The School of Civil Affairs (later ASOPA) was the outcome of the directorate's war-born interest in reforming colonial policy in the South-West Pacific, especially in Papua and New Guinea, which reached into postwar policy and practice. The school ostensibly was to train colonial officials and civil affairs officers to assist in the government of occupied territories. It was anticipated that the Pacific Territories Research Council would supply much-needed research into problems of policy and practice.

Kerr points out that a key role of the directorate was to provide policy advice on the postwar military government of Papua and New Guinea and other occupied nations of the South-West Pacific including British Borneo.²⁰ DORCA prepared studies that Blamey had ordered and provided reports on a broad range of topics that Conlon judged to be of national importance. His staff dealt with such subjects as army health and nutrition, the study of terrain, dietary standards for Papuans and New Guineans employed by the Army, trends in Allied, imperial and international relations, and a host of other matters great and small.

Work of enduring value was performed: the Territories were placed under one administration; their laws were consolidated and codified; and the

15 Kerr, *Matters for Judgment*, p. 100. It does not surprise that the longest chapters by far in two biographical collections are those on Conlon. John Thompson (ed.), *Five to Remember* (Melbourne, 1964), pp. 91–162; Peter Ryan, *Brief Lives* (Sydney, 2004), pp. 28–61.

16 Dorothy Shineberg, 'The Early Years of Pacific History', *Journal of Pacific Studies*, 20 (1996), p. 2.

17 For a more comprehensive list, see Gray, 'Managing the Impact of War', p. 205 n. 34.

18 Leonie Star, *Julius Stone: An intellectual life* (Sydney and Melbourne, 1992), pp. 56–80; Peter McPhee, *'Pansy': A life of Roy Douglas Wright* (Melbourne, 1999), pp. 59–66, 223–4.

19 L. P. Mair, *Australia in New Guinea* (London, 1948).

20 Kerr, *Matters for Judgment*, pp. 97–8.

L.H.Q. School of Civil Affairs, established in Canberra in 1945 to train service personnel to be colonial administrators, became in peacetime the Sydney-based Australian School of Pacific Administration.²¹

Cassandra Pybus's chapter reveals Conlon's quite astonishing personality, which mesmerised many but deeply alienated others, and the networks he cultivated to achieve his ambitions and visions, all of which explain why he was a man for the moment rather than the hour. The wartime edifice that he constructed through personal influence and backstairs intrigue came tumbling down when the circumstances that permitted its existence no longer obtained. He attempted to revive his wartime influence when, in 1948–49, he took over from John Kerr as principal of the ASOPA. This proved disastrous.²²

In Australia the themes of power, influence and their loss accompany the use of social scientists during the war. The experiences outlined in this section underline—beyond personal power struggles—the importance of research as the foundation of colonial policy advice and formulation, dominated nonetheless by Australia's role in the administration of colonial Papua and New Guinea.

21 Peter Ryan, 'Conlon, Alfred Austin Joseph (Alf) (1908–1961)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography. Volume 13* (Melbourne, 1993), pp. 479–80.

22 Cassandra Pybus, *The Devil and James McAuley* (St Lucia, Qld, 1999), pp. 87–96.