

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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file
personnel

Mr. President -

This is a report from one of our men in Australia. I do not know him personally. Allowance should perhaps be made for some personal feelings due to the fact that apparently he and an organization were rather brushed off at headquarters. The organization feels that it can take care of that situation but some of his comments seem to deserve study, with allowances made for possible personal feelings.

Edward Davis

Elmer - All of this is interesting - but the section marked on page 3 is particularly so.

~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

Aug. 25

Harold Guinzburg

Office of War Information

Dear Harold:

This is the way it is--

There are some here who were in Paris who say, "This is the way France was, before the collapse." There are others who were in Singapore who say, "It's just like Malaya, before we went." I suspect it's not quite like either of these things, but simply like Australia before the fall of Australia, if the Japs decide to attack.

I have been all over now, and I have talked to a great number of people. There is shocking disunity, there is a fatalistic depression that is almost solid, and if the Japs landed tomorrow the great majority of Australians would just turn over and play dead. The atmosphere reminds me of Washington in February, 1932. I don't know what has turned this once aggressive, fighting nation into what it is now. There are probably many interlocking reasons, some which Mike will outline in this letter, some of what I'll try to indicate here. Only the American troops, and those Australian troops actually fighting or flying, have escaped the general disintegration of spirit.

It probably had its beginning in the bitterness of old political wounds. For a long time there has been no strong and altogether popular national leadership. There is no one wholly trusted, inspiring national leader now.

Singapore was Australia's Maginot Line, and because of Singapore Australia was possessed of a complete Maginot mentality. It still exists, except in place of Singapore say MacArthur. Australia has not yet learned that the defense of Australia does not lie upon its shores, but upon the islands that stand between Australia and Japan, and upon the Middle East, and upon Hawaii, and with the American fleet.

It is because of this Maginot mentality that half of the Australian Army cannot, by law, be sent out of Australian territory. The Militia is tied to this continent. It is therefore wedded to inactivity, and barrack and town life, and all their evils. Since the Australian Imperial Forces have been called back from the Middle East, they too rot within the confines of the country.

I am very fearful that MacArthur's GHQ, in their anxiety to accumulate sufficient forces to launch an offensive from Australia-- and from Australia and under MacArthur alone-- have aided the Maginot point of view. When I was in Brisbane, talking to MacArthur's embittered staffers, they didn't like it when I pointed out that Australia was, at the moment, being defended not by any accumulation of troops and material here, but by the Marines in the Solomons, and our forces in New Caledonia and the Fiji Islands, and all the other islands in the Pacific not under MacArthur's command.

*Bob
Shenwood*

Since we never met MacArthur himself, we cannot report his personal views. But we can report the views of the members of his staff to whom we talked, and who are fiercely loyal to MacArthur personally, and who reflect MacArthur.

They feel that MacArthur has been "double-crossed" by Washington. They say he was promised certain forces and equipment, and that he has not received them. They are, in my estimation, a completely self-centered lot. To them the whole world revolves around GHQ, Brisbane. This may be common to all General Staffs of an A.E.F. I don't know. I never saw one before.

A few days after we arrived in Australia, the papers blasted a story -- obviously planted because of its unanimity -- quoting unnamed official sources as saying that only a mere trickle of American troops was now arriving, that only one-sixth of the forces under MacArthur's command were Americans, and that the materiel sent to Australia represented only three days of America's production capacity. That story -- and the ones that followed it -- numbed Australia.

I was surprised when newspaper publishers told us the story had been put out by GHQ. I had suspected the Australian government. It didn't seem possible until I heard it from the lips of Colonel Diller, MacArthur's press chief. Yes, he had released the story.

He said he did it to remove all the misconceptions that had grown up in the minds of the Australians -- who believed that MacArthur had hundreds of thousands of American troops and great quantities of materiel, and should begin an offensive. This may be true. But I know that the effect of the story, back home, must have been pressure upon the government to send more forces to Australia.

Personally, I don't think MacArthur will ever have enough troops to defend Australia. He may have enough to capture Tokyo.

In any case, the psychological damage has been done here. In our opinion, we can no longer emphasize production figures when talking to Australia. It only increases their depression. In our opinion we should tell ~~America to defend~~ Australia-- and keep telling 'em -- the same story that we had to tell America before the war -- that the defense of a continent does not lie upon its shores, but upon the furthest point away from its shores where you can come to grips with the enemy.

We must tell them that every plane and gun used against Japan in action anywhere in the Pacific is of far greater use to Australia than a gun or plane in Australia, and not shooting or flying. Further, we must contrive to tell this story officially.

After Singapore fell, Australia was in a blue funk. Australia had been a small boy flexing his muscles and challenging a big bully, but knowing all the time that his big brother stood between the bully and himself. Suddenly big brother collapses. The kid wants to run, but he's in a corner, and he's in panic.

Then MacArthur came, and the spirit of Australia soared swiftly as it had fallen. I suppose everyone ever did the idea that American might had come to the rescue, and Australia was saved. It was a new Maginot Line, and Australia took comfortable refuge behind it. But now everyone in Australia knows that MacArthur is dissatisfied and perhaps bitter because he has been unable to build no great offensive force here.

And again Australia is dazed with apprehension, strangely mixed with apathy. Australia is like the bird paralyzed by the snake-- but somehow sure that the Great White Chief will kill the snake before it strikes.

We don't know, of course, how much will be sent out here. But we are certain that only the Australians, by a maximum effort and the revitalization of its army, can save Australia. And we have a plan, which I'll outline later in this letter. First I want to tell you what we found in Brisbane, and how we were received.

In the first place, when we arrived in Brisbane we found that GHQ had heard vaguely about the OWI, but that they knew nothing of our work. I think they put us down as just another New Deal agency. I can describe their general attitude as very suspicious, and at times hostile. I think that they are at the moment suspicious of everything that comes out of Washington. They probably said, "We want airplanes-- and they send us propagandists!"

We were turned over to Colonel Merle Smith (who at one time was an Assistant Secretary of State.) In addition to the officers brought with him from the Philippines, General MacArthur has what I might call political officers. There is, for instance, Hanford McNider, just elevated to a General officer. Anyway, Merle Smith read our directives, and talked with us for some time. He expressed surprise that we had been empowered to cooperate with the Australian government in the conduct of political and psychological warfare against the enemy.

It was his understanding, he said, that propaganda and psychological warfare was to be supervised not by the OWI but by the Joint Chiefs of Staffs. He thought the OSS had something to do with it. At one point he asked us-- just as man to man, you know -- whether it wasn't true that the OWI and Donovan's organization weren't having a fight over propaganda. We urged him to read the executive order creating OWI. He said, "But has it been superseded by now?" We said we didn't know anything about it.

Well, he introduced us to General Sutherland, MacArthur's Chief of Staff. He said it had been decided that GHQ had decided not to cooperate with anyone actively in propaganda against the enemy, since they felt it was strictly a civilian function. He said GHQ would help us make a survey of radio facilities, listening habits, etc. of the American troops in Australia. It was agreed that I would go to the principal encampments, and find out the facts about reception, facilities, what American and Australian stations could be heard best at what hours, the reactions of the troops to our news shows, and the programs we and the Army are producing especially for the troops, and all the rest of it.

But after Mike went back to Sydney, strange difficulties began to arise. Colonel Diller told me "transportation was too difficult." He said officers in the field were "too busy training to be bothered."

This is of special importance

All this sounded pretty flimsy. We were denied even the minimum cooperation that might be extended to the Perth Gazette, or to the Australian Department of Information. We dickered for days, there in Brisbane. At GHQ I felt like a cross between an enemy alien, and a private, second class.

Finally, Cononel Diller said that if we could show definitely what "you can do for us" they would circulate a questionnaire on radio reception among the troops. Mike wrote him a letter. He said he never received it. I showed him a copy. Finally, I wrote the questionnaire, and he agreed to mimeograph it and send it around. That's the last we heard from Diller.

That is the extent of the cooperation which we have received from GHQ. I might mention one more thing. Merle Smith suggested it might be wise for us to send GHQ copies of all cables and letters we send to OWI!

The demoralization of the Australian troops was more apparent in Brisbane than in any other city. I could never be accused of what Australians call a "wowser" but I am frankly shocked at the drunkenness I've seen among the Aussies. In Brisbane Aussies in uniform reel through the streets all day and all night. They aren't happy drunks. They're just sodden, with their baggy, shoddy uniforms hanging sack-like from them. Their uniforms alone are enough to give them an inferiority complex, compared with the Americans.

And of course the American troops get all the pretty girls, and they have more money, and the American canteens are cleaner and better equipped, and the Americans have snap and drive and are eager for a scrap. The Aussies who came home after being mauled in Egypt and Singapore can only brood and drink.

It is no wonder that one Australian publisher told us, in Brisbane, "We are already a conquered people."

Yet essentially the Australians are good soldiers, as strong and brave as our own. But they have a tradition of no discipline, of being hell-raisers and individualists. It hasn't done them any good in this machine war.

We feel that the whole country reflects the demoralization of the Australian troops. It is not our opinion alone, from personal observation, that the Aussies are demoralized, and that the whole country is in the dumps with them. It is the opinion of every important man to whom we have talked, and of Australian and American officers, outside of GHQ. We didn't discuss it at GHQ.

We are therefore convinced that our one big immediate job is to help give the Aussies back their self-respect, fire them with an offensive spirit, and convert them into first line troops who think they can lick the Japs, man for man.

It is for this reason that we have concocted the slogan, "Every Digger a Commando." We hope to sell it, through the press and radio here, and with the help of OWI in America and England, to the Australian people. We want to convince the Aussies that the way to win the war and save their people is to form of themselves a powerful offensive Army, fit to carry the fight to the enemy.

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We have made a cautious beginning, by enlisting the aid of Frank Packer, the most aggressive and one of the most powerful Australian publishers, who is also an Australian officer. He wants to start the ball rolling in his Women's Weekly, the magazine with the largest circulation in the country.

We are confident that every other important Australian publisher will fall into line. (Fortunately Mike knows most of them very well, personally, and we have sounded out some of them." They are all as concerned as we about the disintegration of the fighting spirit of a fine nation.

That, briefly, is what has been going on.

We want to hear from you immediately the reaction of OWI to what we have begun, for we cannot go ahead without the most complete and imaginative aid from home. We will keep you informed of everything as it comes up.

Regards,

~~ss~~ Pat Frank

(OWI - Australia)