

AMAROO HIGH SCHOOL – CANBERRA, AUSTRALIA



Canberra Struggles Facing an uncertain future

Canberra during WWII – The Homefront



Before and aftermath of war...



Before the war began...

Before World WWII, Canberra was considered to be a small town, with only 11,400 people, according to the census which was taken in June 1918.

One of the reasons Canberra held significance during this time was because of the Federal Government being stationed there. Even now to this day Canberra is characterised by the fact of having the Australian National Parliament located in Canberra.

Events that occurred before WWII in Canberra include the Great Depression, not only impacting Canberra but the whole nation. The Great Depression in October 1929 had a significant impact on Canberra, resulting in altercations with the administration.



Old Parliament House in 1916



Aftermath – a new start...

The War Memorial had primarily been built to exhibit Australia's involvement and significance in WWI, but the Memorial was still incomplete by the beginnings of WWII. After such circumstances the Government extended the Memorial's Charter to include the second world war in 1941.

WWII had a huge impact on everyone, with an approximate of 80 million casualties, including the deaths from war - related diseases and famine. Over 993,000 Australians served in WWII, out of those 23,477 were killed either in action or died later.

The lives of fellow Australians were especially impacted because of the efforts being made by the home front to produce war materials was as important as the battles being fought overseas. Australia was physically affected by the war due to the certain events such as the Darwin bombing on 19th February 1942 and the submarine attack on Sydney Harbour during 31st May 1942 - 8th June 1942, by submarines belonging to the Imperial Japanese Navy. After WWII, the Australian population flourished, with a population over 7 million - 90% Australian born, and Canberra's population started rising above 15,000 by 1946.



The Canberra City Band playing at the ANZAC Day Ceremony, at the War Memorial, 25th of April 1948




The Canberra Pipe Band leading the Ex-Servicemen to their position on the parade ground, for the official ANZAC Day Commemoration Ceremony, at the War Memorial, 25th of April 1951.




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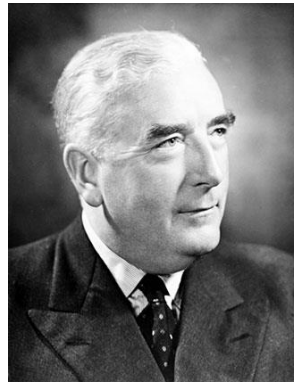




Political parties

Introduction

Robert Menzies was the Prime Minister of Australia at the time when the war started. He had broadcast to inform Australia that Britain had declared war on Germany. This meant that Australia had also entered war, along with Britain. Earle Page had offered the Country Party support to form a composite government but Menzies refused. The Menzies Coalition Government had weakened in August 1940, when three senior ministers were killed when an Royal Australian Air Force plane crashed while going to Canberra's airfield.



Photograph of Robert Menzies



Parliament and WW II

During September 1939, Bertram Stevens had been appointed as a Premier of New South Wales. The United Australia Party and United Country Party coalition Government, began to show it's internal strains. In the same month the Labor Parties, still split as a result of the Land Government crisis that had led to its dismissal in 1932, dumped Jack Lang as the leader of the opposition and replaced him with a far less controversial leader William McKell.

September 1939, Australia had entered WWII. In the months prior to the war, the economic conditions had become worse once again in New South Wales. The government focussed on the war effort and had put many state programs on hold, but McKell argued with the fact that the war was “primarily a Federal responsibility” and that State services should be maintained. During the elections in May, 1941, the UAP vote had collapsed and the Labor Party had returned to office with a strong majority to begin an unprecedented quarter century in power .



By 1942, our nation was facing an unprecedented war emergency. The Commonwealth government began assuming far greater powers, including the vital power of collecting income tax, formerly collected by the States. This alone was enough to ensure increased future and Commonwealth domination of the federal system.

During the war years, more than 130 members and future members of the Parliament of New South Wales served in the Australian military forces. Some remained as serving members whilst in the military forces. Of the many stories, one example follows:


Stanley Stephens, while serving in the Middle East with the 9th Division of the AIF, was blinded at the Battle of El Alamein and invalided back to Australia. Stephens turned to politics as a new career and was elected Member for Byron in 1944, a seat which he retained until 1973. Stephens was Minister for Housing and Cooperative Societies in the Liberal-National Party Government from 1965 until his retirement.



The Bunker

The bunker is a small brick building, housing an electricity substation and a bicycle garage. It might look of very little importance to a passer-by, but during WWII, the Bunker, as it was known, housed the Prime Minister's cables department. *"It was a highly sensitive and highly secret place"* said historian Peter Dowling.

The bunker was the official link from the Prime Minister's Office, in other words Australia, to Britain and to the rest of the world. It had also sent a lot of diplomatic cables, and certainly a lot of cables coming to and from Winston Churchill and the Prime Minister [John Curtin] during the war. The building is tucked away behind West Block and had such importance that it included a walkway straight to the Prime Minister's Department. This had been set aside from the main building because access and knowledge of the cables and messages going through were highly restricted (Dr Dowling).



Times had gotten tense, with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the Japanese attack on Malaya and the sinking of two British capital ships in December 1941. “John Curtin was very, very concerned about the defence of Australia at the time,” Dr Dowling said.” Following the fall of Singapore to Japanese forces on February 15, 1942, Curtin cabled Churchill asking for the 6th and 7th divisions, which were serving in North Africa at the time, to be returned to Australia. Churchill had been a little bit reluctant to do so, but eventually the 7th Division was on its way home. Before the 7th Division had reached Australia, Churchill sent the soldiers to Rangoon to defend Burma against the Japanese and protect India. He diverted the ship carrying the 7th Division without really informing Curtin. When Curtin learned on the afternoon of February 22 that Churchill had 'temporarily' diverted the convoy, his response was swift and decisive, forcing Churchill to give way and order the convoy to sail to Australia.



“Lt-Colonel Robson, Member for Vaocluse in the Parliament of New South Wales, takes the Japanese surrender at Bandjermasin, Borneo.”



“Relations were strained at times between Australian prime minister John Curtin and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (Updated 24 Jun 2016, 8:29 am)”



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Censorship and Correspondence

No letter today the letters are coming very slow. I dont know whether it is the change in address or what. I am getting many letters. I didnt do a thing other this week and but lay around. I got the money you sent me. Thanks a lot. You can take it out of what I am sending home. We played volleyball ball all afternoon and I really had a lot of fun. I only played it once before and I really in a foot game my aim is now now from hitting the ball. I hope my letters are reaching home with out too much censored. I will do no hard to write some but I guess I will have to slow by the way

all for now
love to all
23

675076
Miss Anne Brown
149 Street
A.P.O. 887 N.Y.
1881 1885
Richmond Va

Dear Dad:
Not my address. Please send me yours so I see the old Richmond address may not work as well.

Looking back on the past year's plucking and fighting while we have done well. The whole of the war has brought much for the better.

I have been overseas 15 months which is a long time. You will be grown up and so old lady by the time I come home. Don't let you see mail from you always a big joy half the war. I don't want you wait soldiers overseas. Because there is nothing to see and nothing to see. I am a little bit on my knees shopping. Please, I'll be home again later.

For you, my one year goes from heart to heart as always from
Daddy

V-MAIL



Censorship and Correspondence

The position Australia had in terms of propaganda on the Homefront in WWII was interesting because it was one of the few nations that had a voluntary system for enlisting during all of the conflict. Because of this, the information that was released about the war was usually censored in order to:

- promote enthusiasm about the war
- convince others to enlist
- hide information to enemy countries and information that would worry Australians (such as high death tolls).

Censors were also used to examine media such as books, films, news, and letters, and it was then determined if any of the information should be removed (classified as information which was unsuitable or dangerous when regarding moral, military or political reasons). Many people did figure out that the government was holding information from them, and the information that was released wasn't trusted, which caused downfalls on news companies who lost their credibility. It was proved that Canberra's censorship was the most restrictive of all the other Allied Powers.

Censorship and Correspondence

An example of the censorship during this time is shown when Darwin was bombed in February 1941, where the information released to the public stated "17 killed in raids on Darwin, 6 enemy planes shot down...In 2 air raids on Darwin yesterday it is believed that the total casualties were 17 killed and 24 wounded. Nine of the civilian fatalities were members of the Darwin Post Office staff...no vital damage was done to RAAF installations..."

However 243 people actually died, and there was 300-400 casualties as a result of the bombing.





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Women at war time



Introduction

The role of Australian women in the service and on the Homefront expanded exceedingly in WWII. Women were no longer confined to do specific activities such as nursing, medical and voluntary roles, and they were able to volunteer for a women's army in each of the services.

On the Homefront, as men left jobs to go to war, the number of women being employed enlarged rapidly, and various new professions surprisingly opened to women. The women made beneficial contributions to the war and accomplished numerous roles at the Homefront.



The involvement of women in the war and the stigma behind it


Australian women were not always employed; some of the women worked at home during the war, looking after their children and families. There was a diverse selection of stereotypes about women during WWII. In the 1950's a fundamental role of a women working at home, or a woman's place in the home, was reinforced. The concept of this had to be followed by all girls and women. As there were numerous principles about this specific idea, the society initiated stereotypes to be developed that were generally against a woman's thought processes.

At first, associated with the stereotypes, women were not enabled to work throughout WWII. However, subsequently women were variously involved in WWII, as the stereotypes had been prevented. As innumerable men had left for war, women had to replace men's jobs, making them work in different jobs, therefore breaking the stereotypes that were reinforced. They contributed in manifold jobs such as nursing, hospitality jobs etc. Even though women started to become frequently involved, they were still treated unequally, for instance women received approximately 54% wage in comparison to what males had received for their approximate wage.



What were the new service roles open to Australian women?

Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force (WAAAF) was formed in February 1941 to replace men wireless telegraphy operators for release for service overseas. Numerous members of the WAAAF were occupied in skilled technical work such as signals, communication, and mechanics, although some even worked in traditional female roles like cooks and stewardesses. Even though women were called on to take men's jobs, they got only approximately two thirds of the men's wages for the equivalent occupation.



The Australian's women's army service (AWAS) was formed on 13 August 1941 when the war cabinet granted approval in principle. Although, it was not until October 1941 that the AWAS became operational. AWAS was formed “to free men from specific military duties for employment in fighting units”. The members had to be between 18-45 years and single. Widows that had dependent children were also allowed to enlist. The members served as mechanics, cooks, drivers, typists, tele-communications officers and a dozen other occupations. The AWAS was one of the only non-medical women’s services to send a workforce overseas during the war, while approximately 350 women were posted to Lae, Rabaul and Hollandia near the end of war.

Australian Women's Land Army (AWLA) was established on 27 July 1942, in which they replaced male farm workers that had to either enlist in the armed services or who were working in other essential/compulsory jobs. Members enrolled for full 12 months or the duration . The highest number of enrolment was in December 1943 with 2382 permanent members and 1039 auxiliary members.



Women's movement during the war



Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force



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Education



Canberra High during the War


Children during this time were not mainly affected by war. They weren't governed to the fact of the war or the dangers of the war reaching them. Furthermore, an example of children during the war is from Canberra High. The school was founded in 1938, a year before WWII was declared, although the school's population was very small at the time. A year later the school built a new building to accommodate new students. Two weeks after the construction of this new building, Germany invaded Poland and Australia followed behind Britain on declaring war against the aggressors. The continuing effects of the Great Depression had more effects upon the lives of the residents compared to the war.



19

PREFECTS 1947

Prefects of 1947 in from Canberra High



The students at Canberra high still followed everyday life as it was like a normal day. During the 6 year period of the war life was normal for all students attending at the school. Furthermore, the classes that they attended is close to the classes and teams that are available today. Some of these classes were woodwork, swim teams, tennis teams and more. During this time they had prefects and a celebration war in 1939. The life of these Australians students was normal for a time that had war.


Although the threat of the war was coming at large in 1941 so the school took some precautions. The following year they they dug out slit trenches and camouflaged air raid shelters were built near the school building.



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Living and working conditions during WWII



During war, life for Canberrans was harsh. People were expected to work harder and avoid luxuries and waste. All Australians, including Canberrans, worked hard and pulled together in a sense of unity. Men and women were 'manpowered' (ordered) into essential industries with many women entering the workforce taking on jobs previously only available to men. For the first time, women were recruited into the three armed services in non-medical auxiliary roles. Despite their importance in the war effort, their salaries were far lower than those of their male counterparts. Although many of their jobs disappeared at the end of the war. Civilians, as well as the troops, all needed a sufficient amount of food to survive. Therefore, more workers were needed to cope with the huge demands placed on both agricultural producers and manufacturers. Canberra had to deal with periods of shortages. Rationing regulations were also gazetted in May 1942.



Workmen digging slit trenches on the land of the old Parliament, in preparation for air raids.



In order to manage these shortages, government tried controlling the civilian consumption and aimed to curb inflation, reduce total consumer spending, and limit impending shortages of essential goods. Rationing was enforced by the use of coupons and was limited to clothing, tea, sugar, butter, and meat. From time to time, eggs and milk were also rationed under a system of priority for vulnerable groups during periods of shortage.

Australia had experienced attacks on its own land for the first time and the people faced fear and uncertainty. The government implemented a wide range of measures in preparation for the situation of “total war” and national security. The urgent need was to increase available manpower in all areas.



A staff member of the Parliament house, gluing an “Air Raid Warning: Evacuation of Parliament House” sign on the door.

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Health



Health

The mental and physical health of Australians during WWII was impacted in different ways. Those who lived back home, and the people who were fighting on the front lines, were faced with different diseases and illnesses. They were sometimes treated and sometimes not, resulting in many people dying from them.

While life on the front lines for Australian soldiers was tough, it was also hard for those at home, and the family or friends of those fighting overseas.

108,864 Australian men were injured in war, 33,826 were killed, and over 30,000 were taken as prisoners of war, most of whom ended up dying later as well. Those who survived the war and returned home found it difficult to live their daily lives with their physical disfigurements, or diseases and their mental illnesses that they developed while they were at war.



Health

Some, or a moderate amount of men, had also developed mental illnesses, the most common being “shell shock”, or as we call it today, PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). Mental illnesses were caused by the surrounding environment, and experiences of war that the men had to endure. The soldiers who fought had negative experiences and were threatened with physical harm on the battlefield, and most were actually harmed in one way or another. They also had to go about their daily lives in the trenches knowing that their friends or family who were fighting alongside them might die, or that might too.

The stress and tension of being in such a dangerous environment took its toll on them, and while the effects of PTSD were thought to be temporary by doctors, it was found out in later studies that new symptoms might develop with age, and that the illness could last a lifetime. Mental illnesses such as PTSD impacted veterans in physical ways as well, as they got insomnia, nightmares, and shaking limbs that caused them to fall over frequently, or not be able to stand straight.



Health

The families of these men had to watch their family members' lives drastically change, and most saw, and were impacted themselves, by the things they could no longer do normally.

Doctors thought that these invisible illnesses were faked, and that they would go away soon, but after conducting studies on them, we have found out that although some illnesses can last for a short while, some can be lifelong (Mapw.org.au, 2013).



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Canberra struggles

Facing an uncertain future

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by Amaroo School