

CHAPTER 26

MOROTAI—APRIL 1945

GENERAL MacArthur's forces continued to advance towards the Japanese home islands. By March 1945 the Far East Air Force, operating from new bases in the Philippines, had established air command over Formosan skies and the south China coast. On 1st April, with air cover provided by carrier aircraft of the United States Fifth Fleet, supported by the British Pacific Fleet "employing a method of sea warfare with which previously it had been unfamiliar", American infantry went ashore at Okinawa, one of the Ryuku Islands. Once established on the Ryukus, the Americans would be able to operate land-based fighter aircraft against southern Japan. On Okinawa, the American Tenth Army was opposed by *XXXII Japanese Army* with a strength of 77,000 well-armed and determined Japanese.¹

In Japan, it had been publicly proclaimed that there would not be "another Iwo Jima", and the Japanese defenders of Okinawa made resolute attempts both on land and in the air to hold the American advance. They used their Kamikaze suicide-attacks on a large scale and with some success. The British fleet's assignment in this operation had been to neutralise the airfields on the Sakishima Islands, but the heavy damage done by the suicide attacks to the lightly-armoured American aircraft carriers led to an increase in the relative effort of the more strongly-armoured British carriers.²

General Marshall, reporting to the Secretary of War, said:

By mid-June, the Japanese had lost 20 per cent of their total combat aircraft strength in the battle for Okinawa; in all, 3,400 Japanese planes were shot down over the Ryukyus and Kyushu and 800 more were destroyed on the ground. During the same period our losses totalled more than a thousand aircraft.

Meanwhile, far to the south, the VICTOR operations were continuing. Landings had been made on Panay, Cebu and Negros in the central Philippines. The Far East Air Force had been constantly striking at Jolo, Tawitawi and north Borneo bases, and on the 3rd April, American forces went ashore at Tawitawi Island, about 50 miles from the north-eastern tip of Borneo. Emergency landing fields were to be established at Tawitawi for the use of aircraft that would later provide support for the landing of the Australian forces at Tarakan.

Unopposed landings were next made at Jolo and Basilan, completing the Allied grip on the Sulu archipelago, a string of islands stretching like a necklace from the southern Philippines to Borneo. A further landing was made in the Cotabato area of Mindanao, on the 17th April. This landing virtually completed the VICTOR phase of the MONTCLAIR opera-

¹ See Appleman, Burns, Gugeler and Stevens, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (1948), pp. 483-5, in the official series, *United States Army in World War II*.

² Despatch by Admiral Sir Bruce A. Fraser, Commander-in-Chief, British Pacific Fleet.

tions: the comprehensive plan to reoccupy large areas in the southern Philippines, the Netherlands East Indies, and British North Borneo. These areas, though under Japanese military control, had been ignored, except for air bombardments, by the South-West Pacific forces as they pressed on towards the Japanese mainland.

An important assumption made at this time was "that hostile forces in areas of operation will continue to resist re-establishment of control by the United Nations and that such resistance will be maintained in each defensive area regardless of events in other areas".³

The Dutch were anxious to recover their lost colonies, and their representatives in Washington had long been urging the early expulsion of the Japanese from the Netherlands East Indies, on the ground that the inhabitants both white and native were in distress under Japanese rule. Vice-Admiral Helfrich and Rear-Admiral Van der Nook had addressed the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the subject soon after the Quebec conference of September 1944. Again in May and June 1945 they were seeking from America both air and sea transport assistance to speed the transfer of Dutch troops from Holland to Australia, where they would be trained for operations to recapture Dutch possessions in the Indies.⁴

With the VICTOR phase of the MONTCLAIR operations completed, the OBOE phase—operations in the Netherlands East Indies—was now about to begin.

General MacArthur required the Australian Army to furnish the ground force, and the Royal Australian Air Force the air component for these operations. The over-all objective of the OBOE phase was the "early seizure of Java in order to destroy the principal concentration of hostile forces in the Netherlands East Indies; to re-establish the government of the Netherlands East Indies in its recognised capital; and to establish a firm base of operations for subsequent consolidation".

Originally, the intention was to have six distinct OBOE operations:

- OBOE 1—Tarakan Island (20th April 1945).
- OBOE 2—Balikpapan (18th May).
- OBOE 3—Bandjermasin (28th May).
- OBOE 4—Surabaya, or Batavia (27th June).
- OBOE 5—East Netherlands East Indies.
- OBOE 6—British Borneo.

The Bandjermasin operation (OBOE 3) would only be mounted if carrier-based air support could not be made available to cover the assault on Surabaya. If British fleet carriers were available to give necessary air support, OBOE 4 would be a landing at Batavia rather than Surabaya.

On 4th April, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered MacArthur to prepare to occupy North Borneo immediately after Tarakan (OBOE 1), using Australian troops. On the 8th April, General Headquarters announced that the operations against Bandjermasin-Surabaya-Java, and

* MONTCLAIR basic outline plan for reoccupation of the western Visayan-Mindanao-Borneo-NEI area, prepared by G3 Planning, GHQ, 25 Feb 1945.

⁴ W. D. Leahy, *I Was There* (1950), p. 438.

the consolidation of the rest of the Netherlands East Indies were suspended, and that OBOE 6 operation was amended to an attack into the Labuan-Brunei Bay area of British North Borneo. The hostile garrison there was to be destroyed, and oil and rubber resources protected.

It was significant that the three operations of the OBOE series which were still to be mounted would take the Allies into the oil-producing centres. Tarakan, Balikpapan and the Seria-Lutong areas in British North Borneo were all producers of oil.

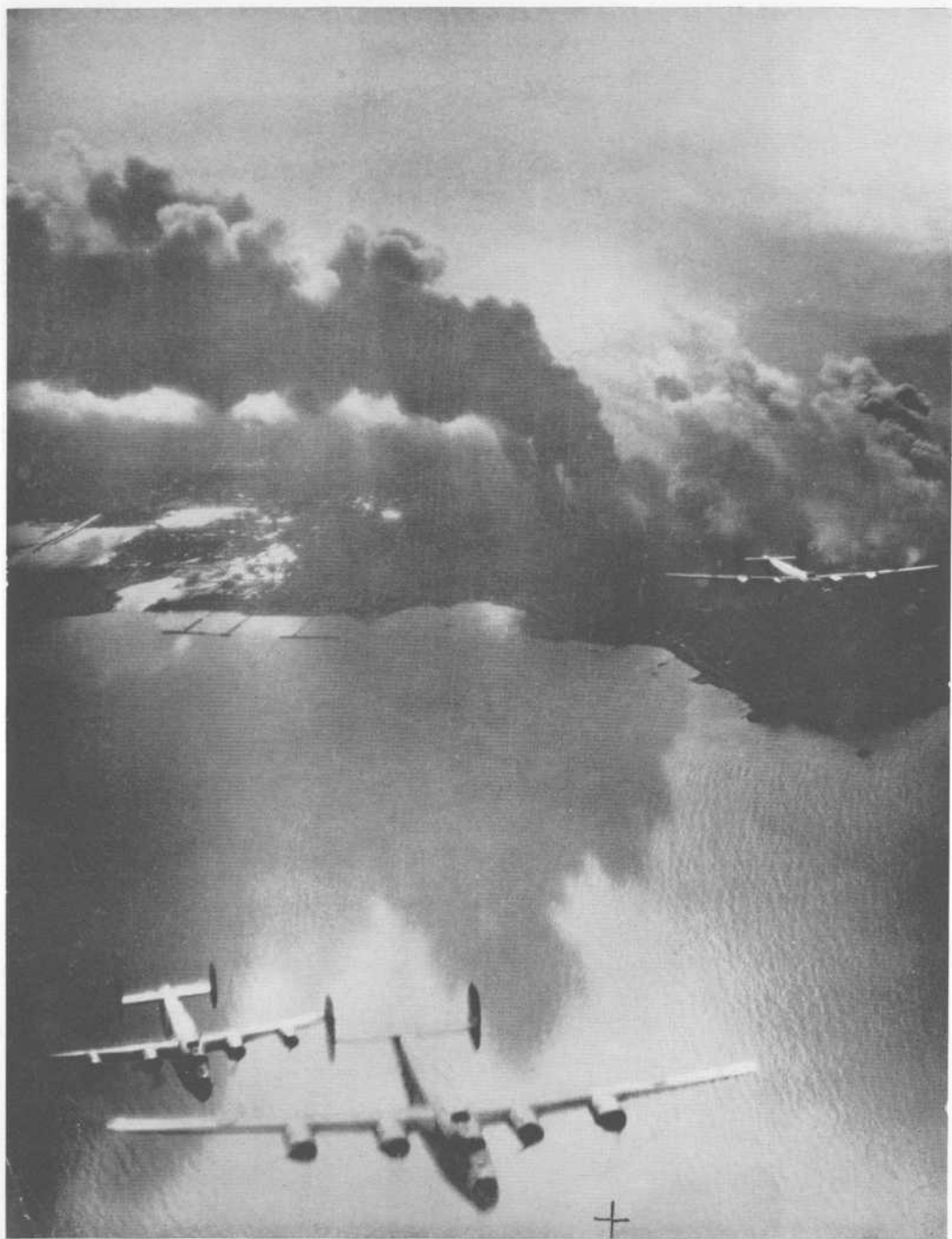
MacArthur's declared policy had been to move as quickly as possible towards major strategic objectives, leaving large pockets of enemy resistance to "die on the vine". The MONTCLAIR plan was therefore a clear departure from his earlier policy, as was the mopping-up campaign in the Philippines. The Australian War Cabinet in May 1945 showed some misgiving about these operations. A War Cabinet Minute of 28th May recorded:

There have been criticisms that the liquidation of by-passed Japanese forces is not by itself a worthwhile effort of our forces. The reasons for the non-participation in the Philippines campaigns have been made clear. But with American progress towards Japan, the operations against Borneo, the N.E.I. and Malaya, have assumed the nature of large-scale mopping-up campaigns. From the aspect of prestige, it is of greater importance to Australia to be associated with the drive to defeat Japan, though for reasons of British and Australian prestige, it would be desirable to have a token force in the recapture of Malaya, in order to avenge the defeat of 1941.

It was clear that political, as well as strictly military considerations, were having an influence on the course of operations in the Pacific. It was true that there was oil to be obtained in Borneo, and Admiral Halsey had reported in January that excessive demands were being made by the Third Fleet on supplies of fuel and lubricants. He had said: "As combat operations approach the Empire, it must be anticipated that fleet oilers will be lost to enemy action. Until the sources of Borneo and the Netherlands East Indies become available, the trans-Pacific supply of fuel, and the means to distribute it, must be more than adequate if the Asiatic war is to be vigorously prosecuted."⁵

The denial of Netherlands East Indies oil to Japan would not achieve any worthwhile objective since the Japanese were scarcely capable of transporting the fuel to the homeland where it was needed. Not only had most of their shipping been sunk, but their lines of communication between Borneo and the mainland of Japan had been almost completely severed by Allied naval and air interdiction. They could still, of course, use the oil locally. Admiral King, in his third report to the Secretary of the Navy, refers to the operations against Borneo as being designed "to deny the enemy the fruits of his conquests in the Netherlands East Indies and his use of the approaches to those areas. These included the capture of Tarakan to obtain its petroleum resources and to provide an airfield for support of the Balikpapan operation. . . ."

⁵ Adm Halsey to Adm King, 25 Jan 1945.



(R.A.A.F.)

Oil wells at Balikpapan burn fiercely after being bombed by Liberators of First Tactical Air Force in June 1945.



(R.A.A.F.)

Cpl A. F. Nixon (left) and F-Lt R. Taylor (right) of No. 3 Bomb Disposal Unit removing the explosive from Japanese bombs at Noemfoor Island on 10th November 1944.



(R.A.A.F.)

Pilots of No. 452 Spitfire Squadron at Halmahera Island in December 1944. Left to right: F-Lt K. D. Cotton, Sqn Ldr L. T. Spence, F-Lts H. V. Freckleton, D. J. Cormack and T. A. Swift.

In January 1945 Air Vice-Marshal Bostock had proposed to Kenney that, for the purposes of the OBOE operations, First Tactical Air Force should be placed under R.A.A.F. Command's direct operational control, and that R.A.A.F. Command should then be given the responsibility for air support requirements of I Australian Corps, which had been assigned to the OBOE operations. So that he could effectively control the air operations, Bostock's plan had included a proposal to move a mobile section of his headquarters from Brisbane to a place near the forward headquarters of the commander of the Australian Land Forces.

Bostock proposed that, when the OBOE operations were completed, First T.A.F. should be again placed under the control of the Thirteenth Air Force for movement to the north, or to the south-west of the Philippines in future offensive operations. "I am particularly anxious," he had said in a letter to Kenney, "that the 1st Tactical Air Force should continue to be employed as a forward offensive formation rather than in a garrison role." Bostock's proposals therefore conformed with the wish of the Australian Government that R.A.A.F. air cover should be available wherever major Australian land forces were in operational areas in contact with the enemy.

Bostock had also proposed that, since the R.A.A.F. would provide Royal New Zealand Air Force units allotted to the Solomon Islands with all fighter control, air-warning facilities, and airfield maintenance, as well as the army cooperation requirements of the II Australian Corps in Bougainville, R.A.A.F. Command should take over operational control in the areas in which the New Zealanders were operating.

General Kenney agreed. After a conference at Leyte with Whitehead, Wurtsmith (now commanding the Thirteenth Air Force), Bostock and Air Vice-Marshal Isitt⁶ of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, he assigned operational control of the New Zealand Air Force to Bostock, and told him that he would be responsible for all air operations south of the Philippines.⁷ He also told Wurtsmith to support Bostock whenever he needed help, and particularly in land operations in the Netherlands East Indies. Bostock was to designate the targets and coordinate the timing of the American and Australian missions.

Bostock opened an advanced headquarters (ADRAAFCOM) at Morotai on the 15th March. The four senior heads of sections were: Group Captain Candy, Operations; Group Captain Cohen, Intelligence; Group Captain Grant,⁸ Administration; and Group Captain Thompson,⁹ Signals. The Advanced Headquarters was set up very close to the headquarters of

⁶ AVM Sir Leonard Isitt, KBE, RNZAF. (1915-18: NZ Rifle Bde 1915-16, RAF 1917-19.) RNZAF Rep Ottawa and Washington 1940-41; AOC RNZAF UK 1942-43; CAS RNZAF 1943-46. Regular air force offr; of Wellington, NZ; b. Christchurch, NZ, 27 Jul 1891.

⁷ G. C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports*, p. 521.

⁸ Gp Capt A. G. Grant, OBE, 270313. Comd School of Admin 1941; SAO HQ Northern Area 1941-42, HQ North-Eastern Area 1942-43; SSOA RAAF Cd and OC RAAF Cd Hq 1943-45; SSOA and OC RAAF Cd Adv HQ, Morotai, 1945. Medical student, former regular air force offr; of Brisbane; b. Rockhampton, Qld, 11 Aug 1904.

⁹ Gp Capt J. Thompson, 33099 RAF. On exchange duty with RAAF 1942-45; Chief Signals Offr Air HQ RAF Iraq 1941-42; Assistant Chief Signals Offr RAAF Cd HQ 1943-44; Chief Signals Offr Adv RAAF Cd 1945. Regular RAF offr; of Woodside, SA; b. Harrow, Eng, 3 Feb 1913.

the Thirteenth Air Force's Bomber Command, with which it was to work in the planning and carrying out of the Borneo operations. The two headquarters mixed well, and there was "much exchange of whisky and small talk between personnel".

The division of responsibility between Air Vice-Marshals Jones and Bostock continued to hamper the smooth working of the organisation, and during 1944-45 further attempts were made to remedy the situation.

Mr Curtin discussed the problem with General MacArthur in June 1944, and again put forward the view that the only practical manner in which the administrative and operational functions of the R.A.A.F. could be integrated, appeared to be by the appointment of an officer who would be in a senior position to those then held by both Bostock and Jones. MacArthur said that the question was entirely one for the Australian Government, and, if it wished to make such an appointment, he would give the officer his fullest cooperation. The War Cabinet met on the 4th August 1944, and approved the appointment of Air Marshal Sir Keith Park¹ as Chief of the Air Staff.² Negotiations were begun through the Australian High Commissioner in London, Mr Bruce, to obtain Park's services. On 30th September, however, MacArthur told Curtin that it was now "too late to make such a change".

In this discussion, MacArthur referred to the difficulties that had existed in relation to the Chief of the Air Staff and the Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F. Command, and the concern that the Minister for Air had felt in this regard. General MacArthur said, however, that nothing serious had resulted and he now felt that "any differences that had existed in the past were now quiet". The strategical scope of the war had gone so far forward that an entirely different situation had developed. He considered it no longer necessary to bring a senior R.A.F. officer to Australia. Had the change taken place when it was first mooted, he said, advantage would have accrued, but he now considered it too late to make such a change.

The extent to which the differences were now "quiet", as General MacArthur affirmed, may be gauged by an exchange of signals some months later.

A signal (No. A.452) from R.A.A.F. Headquarters to the A.O.C. R.A.A.F. Command, on 19th January 1945, concerning an air staff policy directive contained the following phrases:

I take strong exception to the insubordinate tone of your signal and your repeated attempts to usurp authority of this Headquarters. Communications couched in terms such as the one under reply are to cease forthwith.

To which the following reply went back next day to R.A.A.F. Headquarters, from Air Vice-Marshal Bostock:

¹ Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park, GCB, KBE, MC, DFC; RAF. (1914-17: NZ and Royal Fd Arty; 1917-18: RAF.) AOC 11 Gp Fighter Cdn 1940, RAF Medit and Malta 1942-43; AOC-in-C Middle East 1944; Allied C-in-C SE Asia 1945-46. Regular air force offr; of Auckland, NZ; b. Thames, NZ, 15 Jun 1892.

² War Cabinet Minute No. 3693.

Secret, for C.A.S. from A.O.C. I also have responsibilities. You do not understand current Allied air and R.A.A.F. Higher Organisation in accordance with which I am responsible to Commander, Allied Air Forces, and not, repeat not, subordinate to you for the discharge of the duties incumbent upon my appointment. I do, and will continue to take the strongest exception to your unwarranted and uninformed interference.

Without going into the merits of the question at issue in this exchange of signals, the conclusion that a difficult situation existed is inescapable. A few days later, Mr Drakeford made a further attempt to bring about organisational changes. He wrote to Mr Curtin on the 7th February, recommending that R.A.A.F. Command should move to New Guinea (or other forward base, as operational necessity might require) and take over command of all R.A.A.F. formations in that and the more advanced areas. Bostock would, in these circumstances, be vested with operational and administrative control of all R.A.A.F. formations in the South-West Pacific Area outside the mainland of Australia. Operational units remaining in Australia (except those in the Darwin area) would return to the control of R.A.A.F. Headquarters.

On 27th February Curtin incorporated Drakeford's proposal in a letter to MacArthur which mainly concerned the employment of I Australian Corps and, in particular, the unwillingness of G.H.Q. to allow General Blamey to exert direct operational control of I Australian Corps in the coming operations.

A similar question of principle relating to operational control and command of the R.A.A.F. in the South-West Pacific Area has also arisen (wrote Curtin). You will recall from earlier discussions, that the arrangement for operational control by the R.A.A.F. Command and administrative control by the R.A.A.F. Headquarters has never worked satisfactorily. The suggestion for the appointment of Air Marshal Sir Keith Park, now Commander, Allied Air Forces, South-East Asia Area, as Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F. with operational responsibility to the Commander, Allied Air Forces, South-West Pacific Area, which was originally endorsed by you was later abandoned on your advice.

As a result of the advance in recent months, Allied Air Headquarters has moved far from Australia, but the R.A.A.F. Command is still in Brisbane. R.A.A.F. representation on the operational sections of Allied Air Headquarters consists of a small number of lower ranking officers only, and the control of the First Tactical Air Force, R.A.A.F. (our main striking force in the South-West Pacific Area), passed first to the United States 5th Air Force and later to the 13th Air Force.

In order to ensure that the R.A.A.F. takes its rightful place in operations in the South-West Pacific Area, and to provide the necessary measure of cooperation and control of our field formations and units with Allied Air Headquarters, the Minister for Air has recommended to me that R.A.A.F. Command should move to New Guinea (or other forward base, as operational necessity may require) and take over command of all R.A.A.F. formations in that and the more advanced areas. In such event, the Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F. Command, would be vested with operational and administrative control of all R.A.A.F. formations in the South-West Pacific Area, outside the mainland of Australia, being responsible to Allied Air Headquarters for operational control and to R.A.A.F. Headquarters for command and administrative matters.

The adoption of such a course would also enable the units on the mainland to be placed under the operational control of R.A.A.F. Headquarters, subject to operational responsibility to the Commander, Allied Air Forces. I shall therefore

be glad to have your observations on the recommendations of the Minister for Air, in so far as your responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief of the South-West Pacific Area are concerned.

Bostock strongly criticised this proposal, which he described as having been based on "unsound service advice". Bostock sent a teleprinter message to Sir Frederick Shedden (the Secretary of the Defence Department), referring to the forthcoming operations in Borneo and warning: "To attempt to implement higher organisational changes at this late date, and in the face of imminent major offensive operations, would, I believe, seriously jeopardise success. The time factor alone is such that this reorganisation could not be implemented without chaotic confusion and the higher command of air forces supporting the A.I.F. in the MONTCLAIR operations may well be inefficient to a degree which may cause unnecessary casualties and even result in defeat."

He asked that he should be called to Canberra to state his views. Curtin declined to see him, but arranged for him to be co-opted to a meeting of the Defence Committee on 6th March at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne. Meanwhile, on 5th March, MacArthur had written a reply to Curtin's letter of 27th February. In the course of it he said, simply:

With reference to the R.A.A.F. Command, it is desired to have that headquarters move forward to the operational area, but the fact that the major portion of the administrative personnel in the headquarters is composed of W.A.A.A.F.'s who under current policy are forbidden to leave Australia has up to the present precluded the forward movement of the headquarters. It is hoped that the necessary administrative arrangements can be made in order to permit Air Vice-Marshal Bostock to move his headquarters to a location from which he can effectively command the R.A.A.F. in combat.

I shall comment later upon the subject of transferring to R.A.A.F. Headquarters operational control of those elements of the R.A.A.F. Command that are stationed in Australia as soon as I can discuss the matter with General Kenney.

On 6th March the Defence Committee, with Bostock present,³ agreed with Bostock that it would be unwise to make changes until the MONTCLAIR operations were completed. It reaffirmed its earlier view that the division between administrative and operational control of the R.A.A.F. should be ended. Its decisions were:

The Defence Committee noted that the Minister's proposals are designed to obviate some of the difficulties that inevitably arise from the separation of operational and administrative responsibility and authority within the R.A.A.F. and considered that, until this separation is ended, no effective solution of the difficulties to which it gives rise will be found. On this point, the Defence Committee reaffirmed its previously expressed opinion that to achieve the maximum efficiency of the R.A.A.F. there should be unified operational and administrative control of the whole R.A.A.F. in the South-West Pacific Area under one command.

Short of the re-integration of the R.A.A.F. under one command, the Defence Committee considered that, pending the completion of the operations to which the R.A.A.F. is now committed in conjunction with the A.M.F., it would not be advisable to introduce any changes in the present organisation, but at the con-

³ Others present were Adm Sir Guy Royle, Chief of the Naval Staff; Lt-Gen J. Northcott, Chief of the General Staff; AVM Jones, Chief of the Air Staff; and A. J. Wilson, Assistant Secretary, Department of Defence.

clusion of these operations, the question of the operational and administrative control of any R.A.A.F. expeditionary force should be reviewed in the light of the future commitments of that force.

Curtin adopted the Defence Committee's opinion and informed MacArthur of it. On 26th March MacArthur wrote in reply: "I am in entire agreement with the suggestion." Again the question of the reorganisation of the R.A.A.F. was shelved, and it remained so until the war ended.

There was another clash between Air Vice-Marshal Bostock and the Air Board before the end of the war. It arose when General Kenney's Allied Air Headquarters issued an order (No. 2 of 25th April 1945) naming Bostock as "Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, R.A.A.F. Command". The reason for this appeared to be that Bostock had the title of "A.O.C.", yet commanded a number of subordinate A.O.C.'s. The title "A.O.C-in-Chief" would distinguish him from his subordinates, and this was considered desirable. Bostock promptly passed on details of this order to his subordinate formations. However, R.A.A.F. Headquarters, which had the authority to initiate such administrative matters, did not agree with this change. On 22nd May it signalled to R.A.A.F. Command: "Changes in titles of appointment of Commanders, R.A.A.F. formations, require approval of the Commonwealth Government and cannot be made without such approval. The proposed designation of A.V.M. Bostock as 'Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief' is not approved." This signal was followed, on 20th June, by a letter from the Acting Prime Minister to General MacArthur, asking that Allied Air Forces General Order No. 2 be cancelled. No reply seems to have come from the general.

There can be no doubt that failure to overcome the conflict within the R.A.A.F. had an unsettling effect on the force. The War Cabinet did a disservice to the force by failing to take decisive action. A strong inhibiting factor was the desire to keep on friendly terms with the American commanders. This may explain the failure but does not fully justify it.

The First Tactical Air Force had now grown into a big formation. In March 1945 it contained 13,287 men. It was increased during April and by the end of the month was 16,894 strong, including 1,838 officers and aircrew and 15,056 airmen.

With the R.A.A.F. and the troops of the I Australian Corps crowding on to Morotai in preparation for the Borneo operations, this small island of the Moluccas (of which only the southern part was in the hands of the Allies) was an important hub of Allied activity south of the Philippines, and was one of the largest bases in the South-West Pacific Area. Camping space within the perimeter was very restricted, and to the consternation of the American defenders, Australian troops, staging at Morotai for the Borneo campaign, left the perimeter and pitched their tents in what was regarded by the garrison as enemy-held territory.

A new attack wing, No. 86, commanded by Group Captain Whyte, had been assigned to First T.A.F. for the Borneo operations. The headquarters of this unit, together with the ground echelons of its two squadrons (No.

1, armed with Mosquito aircraft, and No. 93, armed with Beaufighters), arrived during March and April. No. 83 Army Cooperation Wing which was to work with I Australian Corps in Borneo also arrived at Morotai, together with No. 4 (Army Cooperation) Squadron, which was equipped with Boomerangs and Wirraways. The commanding officer of the wing was Group Captain Fleming.⁴ In common with other formations, the wing had experienced great difficulty in its movement forward. It had to travel from Lae, in New Guinea, to Morotai, and it had to be on time because one of its units was assigned to a task in the initial assault on Tarakan.

Most of the airmen lived in tents raised far enough from the ground to allow erect walking and, at night, slept on a stretcher under a mosquito net, but sometimes, on first arrival at Morotai, conditions were primitive, and men had to sleep out in the rain and mud without tents. Harassed staff officers worked until after midnight trying to sort out the tangle, and produce tentage and equipment for the men arriving for the Borneo operations. Only a week's notice was received at First Tactical Air Force that between 500 and 600 men of the Australian Liberator squadrons from Darwin would be coming to the island, and there were no tents for them. At one time, No. 78 Wing had 700 men sleeping out in the open, and its commander, Group Captain Arthur, protested vigorously.

Apart from such frustrations and difficulties, conditions at Morotai were not unpleasant, although the camps of First T.A.F. on Morotai were some two degrees north of the equator and the temperature and humidity were high. The rainfall averaged 150 inches a year, and, during February and the first three weeks of March, rain fell in torrents, turning the roads into quagmires and camp sites into "mud heaps".

Access roads between First T.A.F. Headquarters and its units were poor; men and vehicles had to plough through a sea of mud. The journey between First T.A.F. Headquarters and the advanced headquarters of R.A.A.F. Command took an hour, sometimes longer, because of the poor state of roads. This situation would have been improved had R.A.A.F. heavy vehicles been at Morotai earlier, but there was little shipping space available for this transport.

Hewn from a coconut grove, the Pitu and Wama airfields were the scene of much activity. American and Australian aircraft, including Liberators, Mitchells, Catalinas, Beaufighters, Kittyhawks, Spitfires, Lightnings and Black Widows, were busily taking off and landing in their daily strikes against Celebes, the Philippines, Borneo and Halmahera. Douglas transports (Dakotas) of the American air forces and No. 34 Squadron of the R.A.A.F. (which had been assigned to First T.A.F. for transport duties), were also landing and taking off in an almost ceaseless procession, not only during the day, but most of the night. Operations personnel at Wama airfield would handle as many as 400 aircraft a day, and at times aircraft would be landing at the rate of one every fifteen seconds. No. 60

⁴ Gp Capt J. R. Fleming, 35. 50 Sqn RAF; SO Orgn, Flying Training Cd RAF 1940-41; comd RAAF Stn, Pearce, 1941, 4 SFTS 1942, RAAF Stn, Laverton, 1942-43; Asst Comdt RAAF Staff School 1943-45; comd 83 Wing 1945. Regular air force off; of Camberwell, Vic; b. Rockvale, NSW, 11 Aug 1905.

Operational Base Unit, at Morotai, was assigned to control Wama airfield at short notice, but the unit had great difficulty in taking over because of the shortage of flying-control personnel. It was a new experience for the R.A.A.F. to handle an airfield like Wama, because back in Australia the R.A.A.F. controlled airfields which had comparatively few aircraft operating from them. A transport plane had to be sent to Noemfoor, to pick up flying-control personnel from No. 47 Operational Base Unit before it was possible for No. 60 Operational Base Unit to begin duty at Wama.

As well as having the usual motley collection of Liberty ships, LST's, and LCI's, which during every hour of the day were engaged in loading and disgorging their cargoes, the deep water of the bay harboured PT boats, air-sea rescue launches, crash boats, "ducks"⁵ and other small craft, which, each busy about their allotted tasks, added something of a regatta atmosphere to the activities of war. A few miles away, beyond the perimeter, Japanese forces were still at large. The 93rd American Division was employed on the perimeter to prevent any attacks on Allied forces and installations, but its activities were limited to patrolling and there were only occasional brushes with the enemy.

Until I Australian Corps became established on Morotai, the R.A.A.F. drew its food from the Americans, including such delicacies as fruit salads, tomato juice and sweet corn. The standard of the American rations was regarded by the men as being good, although there were shortages of fresh meat. There were more complaints when the R.A.A.F. began to draw rations from the Australian Army.

They found the Australian fare monotonous and there was frequently a shortage of fresh bread and meat. There were sharp contrasts back at Noemfoor; units of No. 81 Wing, which were still drawing American rations in March, were receiving fresh eggs, butter and pork, of which there were ample supplies available. Beer, chocolates and cigarettes were in stock at the canteens in Morotai in April, together with Comforts Fund supplies.

Air Commodore Cobby had found it necessary to suspend the replacement of airmen in his command. Normally, a tour of duty in the tropics was fifteen months and those who had served that period, and many more who had been in the tropics for periods up to twenty months, had to remain with their units. This action was necessary because of inability to get replacements up from the south, mainly for lack of transport. The coming operations in Borneo would make heavy demands on his men, and if he could not get men up from the south it was obvious that he would not be able to relieve those whose tours of duty had expired.

To keep up the men's spirits units maintained programs of sport and recreation. A sports competition of both Rugby and Australian Rules football aroused considerable interest. Squadrons also had their men playing basketball and cricket matches, and organised frequent swimming parades. Cobby did his best to encourage such activities.

⁵ A 2½-ton amphibious truck used for short runs between ships and the shore. The name was adapted from the equipment lettering DUKW.

There were minor irritations at Morotai. They stemmed from a variety of sources. A not uncommon report at this period appeared under the signature of the commanding officer of No. 79 Squadron in April. He said:

During the month of April this squadron has passed through a very difficult period in functioning and carrying out the operational commitments of a fighter squadron . . . essential equipment is still, and has been, deficient for the past eight weeks . . . squadron strength is still approximately fifty bodies down . . . strip [airfield] personnel were required for loading parties which seriously hindered adequate maintenance on aircraft . . . a large proportion of the newly arrived personnel lacked squadron training . . . discipline consequently suffered as the squadron was divided up . . . a report on the difficulties in which 79 Squadron has had to operate has been submitted to 80 (F) Wing headquarters on two occasions . . . too much has been expected from this squadron with its deficiencies in equipment and personnel. . . .

The Australian Army and the Thirteenth Air Force produced daily newspapers which were available to men of First T.A.F. There was a radio station on the island, broadcasting the news, and Intelligence officers occasionally gave talks on current events.

Optimism about the outcome of the war was at its peak at the end of April, by which time the Philippines campaign had ended, Okinawa had been invaded, and it had become apparent that Germany must surrender. There had been an increase in enrolments in correspondence courses, indicating that the men were thinking of their prospects in civil occupations after the war. The R.A.A.F. educational services at Morotai had begun classes in subjects such as English, mathematics and languages; but activities generally in education had been handicapped by the acute shortage of good books.

Long absence from areas of civilisation was one of the main factors that made life at Morotai tedious. In Europe, or the Middle East theatres of war, there were generally congenial towns not far away. But on the islands of the Pacific the men had only what amenities they could bring with them. The nostalgia for the sight and companionship of white women was profound. In Europe an Australian airman could be relaxing in London within a few hours of completing a sortie over Germany. At Morotai, he came back from a strike on Halmahera to canvas tents, mud, bully beef, and little else. Parties were occasionally arranged at messes on the islands to which army nursing sisters sometimes came, but this was a rarity, as one may gather from a facetious entry in a squadron history sheet written at Noemfoor, which reported that, at a party given at the mess "only dashing F-Lt ——— arrived with a lady".

Compared with the early stages of the New Guinea campaigns of the R.A.A.F., the incidence of malaria at Morotai was negligible. In March, there was slightly less than one case per 1,000 men per month in the whole of First T.A.F. command. The defeat of this scourge of the swamp and jungle was one of the great triumphs of organisation and medical skill in the Pacific war. There were five main factors in its defeat: (a) Atebrin—a drug which the men were obliged to take regularly in

tablet form; (b) clothing discipline—airmen had to wear gaiters and shirts with sleeves rolled down at night and use nets when sleeping; (c) D.D.T.—this potent insecticide was sprayed from aircraft in areas where men were camped or operating; (d) Malarial control units—whose men penetrated gulleys and swampy ground, spraying with oil and D.D.T. to kill the mosquitoes both in their adult and larval stages; (e) Spraying of tents and messes with D.D.T. There were occasional outbreaks of dysentery and gastro-enteritis, but skin complaints caused most trouble.

Bottled beer was available in small quantities to the men at Morotai and Noemfoor, and officers, in addition, received issues of spirits. It had become a common practice among many of those who received beer to sell it for money, or exchange it for cigarettes and other articles such as fountain pens and watches. At one time there were on Noemfoor Island 70,000 American servicemen and about 6,000 to 7,000 R.A.A.F. personnel. The Americans had no liquor supplies but much money, and they were eager to buy liquor from the Australians either for cash or by bartering cigarettes. Air Commodore Cobby, in evidence to the Barry Commission, mentioned later, said:

Most of the fellows wanted their beer badly, but there is always a proportion who do not drink. They were trading it to Americans in a surreptitious way. The Americans would give them on the quiet five cartons of cigarettes, or 25/- for a bottle of beer. These fellows used to trade cigarettes back to their own friends at 2/- a packet. That meant they were getting £5 for 1/3d. If you were entitled to two bottles of beer a week, it meant £10. A lot of people are quite prepared to go without it for £10. That led to other pernicious habits. Some business-minded airmen formed a kind of ring to buy up any liquor they could get and they finally started to get in chaps who normally would have drunk their beer . . . we had to crush that too, which took some little time. . . . On the nights when our beer was issued our camps were invaded by hordes of Americans.

Cobby took what steps he could to stamp out this trade. He ordered that the tops were to be removed from the bottles before issue to the men. In January 1945 he warned that unless the sales ceased he would stop the issue of beer. The Americans and R.A.A.F. provost marshals conferred about methods of preventing the trade, and a number of airmen were punished for taking part in it. In spite of these measures, however, the practice grew. It became obvious that some of the officers were also engaged in it, and Cobby later had certain officers charged and they appeared before courts-martial.

At the end of 1944 Group Captain Arthur had drawn the attention of Air Commodore Cobby to what he believed were unjustifiable losses of men and material. Acting from a high sense of duty, he was the driving force behind a movement at Morotai to correct what was considered by himself and others in the force, to be a most unsatisfactory situation concerning the flying operations of the squadrons.

After his interview with Cobby, Arthur expected that something would be done to correct an operational policy which he considered was wasteful in men and aircraft. But he was disappointed; and in March and

April the nature of the operations carried out appeared to him to be more wasteful than before.

Arthur was convinced that something must be done. He was not willing to acquiesce in silence, and began to seek a new course of action to correct the defects which he believed to exist. In March he had gone to Morotai to find out whether any other senior officer was willing to make a stand against the type of operations the R.A.A.F. was carrying out. He was prepared to sacrifice his own career in an attempt to achieve his purpose.

At Morotai, Arthur sought out senior officers who thought as he did, including Group Captain Caldwell, who had already complained of the operations to the Chief of the Air Staff; Wing Commander Gibbes,⁶ wing leader of No. 80 Wing; and Wing Commander Ranger,⁷ a staff officer on the planning staff for the Borneo operations. Other officers who supported the movement were Squadron Leader J. L. Waddy, commanding officer of No. 80 Squadron; Squadron Leader Grace, commanding officer of No. 82 Squadron; Squadron Leader Vanderfield, and Squadron Leader Harpham.⁸ During March and early April these officers met and discussed the problem and all agreed that something should be done. Caldwell suggested that the only method open to them was to resign their commissions.

On 14th April a fairly definite course was decided on. They agreed to resign in a body. The date of the resignation hinged upon Caldwell's return to Australia on leave. He was to sound the Minister for Air and Mr J. P. Abbott, a member of Parliament, and then write to each of the other seven officers informing him of the result, after which each officer would put in a request for termination of his commission.

On 19th April Cobby had on his desk at Command House eight identical-worded applications to resign. They read:

I hereby respectfully make application that I be permitted to resign my commission as an officer in the Royal Australian Air Force, forthwith.

Cobby asked some of his senior officers if they knew what was behind it; but they were unable to say. He then summoned all the officers concerned (except Caldwell) to his office to find out what the trouble was but all refused to tell him. Cobby later described his efforts to get them to discuss their complaints:

I saw them individually first and I saw them collectively and asked them what it was about and pointed out that the terms of the application to resign in the first place could not receive any support from me in any way as they were not submitted in the terms of orders. It is laid down that there must be some reason for wishing to resign your commission or leaving the service.

However, they said, "We wish them to stay" and they wanted them to stand. I asked them if there was some row on somewhere which I could fix up, as they were all good officers personally known to me and in my opinion quite good fellows

⁶ W Cdr R. H. M. Gibbes, DSO, DFC, 260714. 450 Sqn; comd 3 Sqn 1942-43, 80 Wing 1944-45. Salesman; of Manly, NSW; b. Balgowlah, NSW, 6 May 1916.

⁷ Gp Capt K. Ranger, 250300. Comd 12 EFTS 1941-42, 8 EFTS 1942; No. 9 Ops Gp 1942-43; SOA 5 Gp 1944-45, 1 TAF 1945. Of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Melbourne, 11 Sep 1913.

⁸ Sqn Ldr S. R. Harpham, 252148. Comd 60 ORU 1944-45. Stock agent; of Tatura, Vic; b. 3 Jan 1907.

and fellows of quite good sense and fellows that I have seen quite a lot of over the period that I was in command and they said that they preferred not to answer. . . . I said: "Is this something against me, or having a go against me in this, because if so, if you feel that I have fallen down in my job, I will straight away ask to be recalled," and they said, "It has nothing to do with you."

Cobby decided that he must inform Bostock that Arthur and other officers had put in their resignations. Bostock asked permission to see them. Cobby agreed and Bostock, on his arrival at First T.A.F. Headquarters, asked the officers if they would reconsider the matter. He asked them to take up the applications which he put down in front of them on a table and tear them up. If they did so, nothing further would be heard of the affair, he said; but they all refused. However, on Bostock's request, they agreed to change the word "forthwith" to "at the end of current operations". This would make clear their intention not to prejudice the course of the R.A.A.F.'s operations against Borneo.

It was apparent to Bostock that there was much dissatisfaction in First T.A.F. and he made up his mind to seek a drastic remedy. On 22nd April, after his meeting with the seven officers, he sent a signal to Air Force Headquarters reporting that morale in First T.A.F. was at a "dangerously low level", and recommending the transfer of Cobby, Simms⁹ and Group Captain Gibson from their posts. In the course of the long signal he said:

Seven officers, including one commander of a wing, two squadron commanders and one wing leader have submitted applications for permission to resign their commissions. These applications all bear the same date and are identically worded. Applications offer no reasons for resignations. In presence of A.O.C. 1st T.A.F. I interviewed the seven officers concerned and failed to obtain any explanation of their actions. Demeanour of all officers during my interview with them was respectful but bitter and unrelenting. . . . The A.O.C. T.A.F. must accept responsibility for the state of his command and this inescapable principle is fully recognised by Cobby with whom I have had the fullest and frankest discussion from which it is clear that he has been badly served by his senior staff. I must therefore request that Cobby be relieved immediately of his appointment and that similar action be taken concerning Gibson and Simms. Cobby has seen this signal. I urgently request that Scherger be appointed forthwith to relieve Cobby and that Scherger should arrive at Morotai in time to accompany the assault force which sails from Morotai on the 27th April. . . . I have discussed the whole situation with General Morshead who is vitally concerned as 1st T.A.F. is providing air component of his task force. General Morshead concurs with my views generally and advises me that the action I am now taking is the only possible course.

Cobby denied that the morale of the force was low. He added that there might be discontent, which was understandable, but it was not discontent which affected morale in the proper understanding of the word "morale". However, the signal went to Air Force Headquarters and Air Vice-Marshal Jones flew immediately from Melbourne to investigate. General Kenney came down to Morotai from his Manila headquarters for a conference with Generals Blamey and Morshead and Air Vice-Marshal Bostock con-

⁹ Gp Capt R. H. Simms, AFC, 31. SASO HQ Southern Area 1941-42, HQ Eastern Area 1942-43; HQ North-Western Area 1943-45, 1 TAF 1945. Regular air force off; of Melbourne; b. Ireland, 14 Aug 1906.

cerning air support for the Tarakan operation, and, learning of the trouble at First T.A.F., had asked to see the seven officers. The meeting took place at Bostock's headquarters and Jones attended it.

According to the evidence before Commissioner Barry, the general began the discussion by referring to the applications to resign and then said that many times in a war people were dissatisfied and felt that they were wasting their time. He had many units in back areas doing garrison duties, and they were very fed up with their role; in some cases he was frightened to go near them, but at the same time they had to be there and had to be doing the job, and all he could do was to relieve them as soon as he possibly could. He asked the officers not on any account to "throw in your badges", but they all refused.

The immediate upshot of the incident was that Air Vice-Marshal Jones gave instructions that Group Captains Gibson and Simms were to be withdrawn from their appointments and that Air Commodore Cobby should be relieved. On his return to Melbourne he recommended to the Minister for Air that an enquiry should be made by a judge or a commissioner. The Minister agreed and appointed Mr John Vincent Barry, K.C., as a commissioner. Jones considered an enquiry essential mainly on account of allegations relating to trade in liquor. The terms of reference of the commission stressed the liquor question above the more significant issue of the operational activities of First T.A.F. and the causes of discontent at Morotai.

Barry, after examination of witnesses and documents over many weeks, came to the conclusion that

from about the beginning of January 1945 there was a widespread condition of discontent and dissatisfaction within 1st T.A.F. at Morotai. The two main factors which brought about that condition were the opinions generally held about the nature of the operational activities upon which the wings were engaged and the attitude of the senior staff officers, Group Captain Simms and Group Captain Gibson. As that widespread condition developed and existed without his being aware of it the A.O.C. 1st T.A.F. failed to maintain proper control over his command.

Barry found that expenditure on the operations described by certain unit commanders far exceeded the material damage inflicted on the enemy and that, from that standpoint, they were wasteful; and this was supported by a report by the R.A.A.F's Operational Research Section describing similar operations. This report said:

The results achieved hardly appear to provide a reasonable return for the effort expended. . . . These operations indicate the wastefulness inherent in the tactical employment of air forces . . . against small pockets of the enemy . . . in this theatre.

It is interesting to note also that Air Vice-Marshal Bostock, writing from Brisbane to the Air Officer Commanding, Western Area, on 28th May 1945, made these observations:

I notice that in your remarks relating to all squadrons you lay stress on the number of flying hours per squadron for the month as an index of the value of the

work performed. I feel that this is a dangerous practice since the mere piling up of flying time does not necessarily indicate the value of air operations completed, or even the usefulness of war training exercises. Furthermore, recent experiences in 1st Tactical Air Force, make it quite clear that the morale of aircrew and ground personnel of squadrons may become seriously affected if the impression is gained that unnecessary flying is ordered for the primary purpose of enabling the Area Headquarters to report figures which compare favourably with squadrons in other commands and without proper regard for the operational or war training value achieved. The principle must be adopted that flying must only be ordered to meet operational commitments and to maintain squadrons at a high state of operational efficiency. Effective conduct of operations and not the building up of flying times is the true index of efficiency.

The conflict of opinion as to the operational effort required to end the war against Japan was not by any means confined to First Tactical Air Force. In fact the debate went on at the highest levels. President Roosevelt was afraid that it might cost the lives of another million Americans before Japan capitulated. Some of the senior strategists believed that it would be necessary to invade Japan, others that it was only necessary to continue a strategic bomber offensive to force the enemy to capitulate.

As for the by-passed areas where the Australians were engaged in 1945, General MacArthur, reporting to the Army Chief of Staff, said:

The enemy garrisons which have been by-passed in the Solomons and New Guinea, represent no menace to current or future operations. Their capacity for organised offensive effort has passed. The various processes of attrition will eventually account for their final disposition. The actual time of their destruction is of little or no importance, and their influence as a contributing factor to the war is already negligible. The actual process of their immediate destruction by assault methods would unquestionably involve heavy loss of life without adequate compensating strategic advantages.

When MacArthur wrote that the influence of these forces was "negligible" he seems to have forgotten that, until the fourth quarter of 1944, these Japanese forces were immobilising six American divisions which were engaged in protecting bases in areas otherwise occupied by the enemy; and that, since then, four Australian divisions had been similarly employed.

General Blamey pointed this out. He said that the 90,000 "fanatical Japanese" in the New Guinea territories (actually there were far more) would fight to the death and he emphasised that large bodies of troops were essential to contain them until their destruction was determined upon.

Australian operations in the by-passed areas were criticised in the Australian Press and Parliament, and by the troops themselves; and later the War Cabinet called on General Blamey to explain his conduct of the operations. He wrote that his object was:

To conduct operations against the enemy with a view to:

- (a) destroying the enemy where this can be done with relatively light casualties, and so to free our territory and liberate the native population and thereby progressively reduce our commitments and free personnel from the Army;

- (b) where conditions are not favourable for the destruction of the enemy, to contain him in a restricted area by the use of a much smaller force, thus following the principle of economy.

Blamey said that to commit any troops, and particularly Australians, to a passive role of defence was quickly to destroy their morale, create discontent and decrease resistance to sickness. The enemy would continue his domination of the natives and the prestige of the Australian nation would be lowered throughout the world.

At a discussion in the Advisory War Council on 6th June, Mr Spender and Sir Earle Page both criticised General Blamey's appreciation. Sir Earle Page said that he was not prepared to take any responsibility for the operations that were being conducted in the three areas. Spender said that in some respects the reasoning in the appreciation was "inconsistent and illogical" and that on "no occasion had he concurred in the use to which the Australian forces were being put".

The Japanese themselves in Bougainville were surprised that the Australians began operations against them, because they believed that their troops in these areas were strategically impotent. When they learned that Australian troops had replaced American troops at Torokina they took the view that their situation in Bougainville was becoming "grave".

The American leaders had been content, when moving through the Solomons and New Guinea, to seize a beach-head, develop airfields and then move on to another objective, leaving strong forces behind to garrison their bases. They had no intention to destroy the Japanese forces in the islands piecemeal but merely to contain them and develop bases from which to leap farther ahead towards Japan. This policy saved lives, but, as mentioned, it tied up large forces on garrison duties: so large, indeed, that MacArthur was unable to assemble a strong enough force to attack the Philippines until Australian divisions had relieved his New Guinea garrisons.

During the operations in the Philippines, however, the policy of G.H.Q. was changed. MacArthur said that the idea of by-passing the Philippines "was not only unsound strategically but basically immoral, because it would abandon all the American prisoners that the Japs held in the Philippines and seventeen million Filipinos to the enemy".¹ He was echoed by General Kenney who said that "if we blockaded them and left half a million or so Japs in their country to steal their food and subject them to misery and starvation, I felt we would not be keeping faith with them".² Thus in regard to the liberation of the Philippines, the American leaders employed the same policy as Blamey's in New Guinea, and used one of the same arguments to explain it.

The natives in Japanese-occupied areas were often in a lamentable state. Round Wewak and in Bougainville, the Japanese, now cut off from their homeland, had dispossessed the natives and taken their food, leaving them to starve.

¹ *General Kenney Reports*, p. 377.

² Kenney, p. 371.

The Native War Damage Compensation Committee³ reported that "in Bougainville those [natives] brought into our lines are literally skin and bone". The report claimed that "one quarter of the population of Bougainville may have perished. . . . The invasion and war activities . . . have had effects upon the natives so calamitous and so far removed from anything with which their experience and way of life have made them familiar, that it is beyond their power to cope with them."

As for First Tactical Air Force, Cobby, before the Barry Commission, defended his conduct of operations from Morotai and denied that those operations were wasteful. He said that only a minimum number of planes "consistent with keeping the country neutralised" were in operation. He continued:

I should like to mention that we were operating at only about one-third of our capacity and that, without straining our resources at all, we could have pushed up our operations threefold . . . this in relation to the allegations or belief, that we needlessly ran up hours. . . . Apparently there was some discontent, but even that was not dangerous. In fact, I felt that it was quite the reverse, that it was a healthy sign of discontent amongst certain officers who wished to do more in the war than they were doing. Unfortunately, it was not within the power of 1st T.A.F. to give them that more important or more interesting work. . . .⁴

In the South-West Pacific in 1944 and 1945, air and land forces had to be committed against the Japanese armies in the "by-passed" territories. Throughout the war the air force in North-Western Area, for example, was largely engaged against enemy bases which it was not intended to attack with land forces. One of the great advantages conferred by effective air and sea power, with its great mobility, is that, by simulating a serious threat, it can tie down large defensive forces.

Opinions differed as to the degree of activity that should have been employed by the forces engaged against the by-passed enemy bases. Indeed, different policies were in fact adopted in different places. In the Australian territories General MacArthur preferred merely to defend his perimeters, but in the southern and central Philippines he preferred to continue the fight until all resistance had been overcome. In Bougainville, and on the New Guinea mainland, General Blamey decided to undertake full-scale offensives, but on New Britain to hold a line well back from the enemy's main defences.

If military operations against enemy forces whom it is intended to contain are limited, air action should usually be intensified, and it was on this principle that the operations of the Thirteenth Air Force and First T.A.F. were decided in 1944 and 1945.

What were the basic causes of the malaise of the First T.A.F. at Morotai? They were not the discomfort of the living conditions. These had been far worse in 1942 when the R.A.A.F. in New Guinea had been in high fettle. They were not the divided control of the Australian Air Force. This had been a subject of irreverent comment in the force for

³ The members of this committee were J. V. Barry, K.C., chairman, Major I. Hogbin, an anthropologist, and Major J. L. Taylor, of the New Guinea Administration.

⁴ Barry Commission, evidence, p. 2,328.

some time without substantially affecting its efficiency. The fundamental cause seems to have been the conviction of a group of young leaders that they were engaging in operations that were not militarily justifiable—a conviction widely shared also by many Australian soldiers and Australian political leaders. It is perhaps significant that several of them had served with distinction in a critical period in the Middle East. After that the operations of 1944 and 1945 were particularly frustrating. The subsequent inquiry made it clear that almost everyone concerned acted from the highest motives, and was convinced that, in the crisis, he acted wisely.