CHAPTER 30
THE WAR ENDS

On the 6th August 1945 an American B-29 bomber dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima in southern Japan, destroying nearly all the built-up area of the city and killing some 60,000 people. On the 8th Russia informed Japan that she would declare war next day. A second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on the 9th August, and the following day Tokyo Radio could be heard quoting a report that Japan was willing to surrender.

There had been only two paths the Japanese could take. One was unconditional surrender and the other amounted virtually to self-imposed destruction. Many military authorities have been impressed by the fact that the Japanese entered the war with no over-all strategic plan to destroy the military power of the United States and Britain. The Japanese merely hoped, after seizing areas which they considered vital, that the counter-offensive would be made either impossible or so difficult that the British and Americans would finally make a peace which would leave them with considerable gains.

In one week of July 1945, no fewer than 10,460 aircraft sorties had been sent against the Japanese forces and Japan itself. The Japanese, carefully husbanded their few remaining aircraft for the expected invasion, had mounted a mere 235 sorties in reply. The United States Third Fleet, reinforced by the British Pacific Fleet, had roamed at will during July in Japan's home waters, shelling industrial areas along the coasts and sending squadron after squadron of aircraft to bomb and strafe cities and communications. Japan's remaining war industry and livelihood had been crumbling under these blows, and those of the Superfortresses of the Twentieth Air Force, which were scattering fire bombs and explosives on the industrial centres.

Air bombardment had cost the Japanese 806,000 casualties, of whom 330,000 were fatal. General Kawabe, who commanded the Japanese Army Air Forces, said that after the loss of Okinawa the Japanese air force withdrew its aircraft (some 5,000) from the fighting altogether so that it would have a force intact to resist invasion when it came, but the situation deteriorated so much that the Emperor decided to end the war.

After the fall of the Philippines and Okinawa, General MacArthur had made ready for the final campaigns against Japan. He had been preparing a three-pronged assault on southern Kyushu for November of 1945 (Operation OLYMPIC). This was to be followed, if necessary, by a landing on Honshu in which MacArthur would use three American armies (including the First Army redeployed from Europe) to destroy the Japanese forces on the main island and occupy the Tokyo-Yokohama area. This was to be Operation CORONET. In the meantime the strategic

1 US Strategic Bombing Survey, Pacific War Summary, p. 20.
air offensive, complemented by air and naval blockade, was to go on. It had been considered that this policy might result in the Japanese capitulating without an invasion. If, however, an invasion proved necessary, then the Japanese will to resist would be depleted and the land campaign in Japan would be easier and Allied lives would be saved. But operations OLYMPIC and CORONET proved unnecessary.

For months the Japanese Government had been seeking a way out of the war. The Emperor, after the fall of Okinawa, had told the members of the Supreme War Direction Council on 22nd June that they should consider ending the war. At this meeting of the Council he told them that the war had been waged for three years and a half and its havoc was becoming more intense. He said that although it had always been important for those engaged in battles to exert their utmost, he felt that something must be done to end the war.²

² Admiral Toyoda (interrogation, Historical Div, GHQ Tokyo).
Admiral Toyoda, speaking after the war of the situation in early June 1945, said:

Conditions were such that Okinawa was already totally lost, the sea blockade of the Japanese homeland was so complete that neither procurement of overseas resources nor reinforcement of expeditionary troops were any longer possible; enemy air raids against the homeland were intensified day by day and loss and drop in production of military supplies were great. The navy had lost virtually all of its surface forces and had no heavy oil. . . . The nation’s fighting power both military and civil became paralyzingly deteriorated to a high degree and from a purely operational standpoint it was utterly impossible to hope for a successful conduct of the war. . . . In July of 1945, the month’s production of aircraft had fallen to around 600, less than half of the previous year.

On 10th July the Emperor had been in touch with his Foreign Minister and had suggested a Special Ambassador should be sent to Moscow without delay. Ambassador Sato in Moscow had approached the Vice-Commissar of Foreign Affairs with this proposal on 13th July, but had been told that Stalin and Molotov were both about to depart for Potsdam. The actual answer received on 8th August was the breaking off of diplomatic relations. At this stage no member of the Japanese Supreme War Direction Council had any fundamental objection to ending the war.

The Emperor had called an Imperial Conference on the night 9th-10th August and it had agreed that, subject to the Emperor’s position not being affected, the terms of the Potsdam declaration would be accepted. The decision had been made by the Emperor himself who said: “I have decided to endure what is unendurable and to accept the terms of the Potsdam Declaration.”

The use of the atomic bomb and the entry of Russia into the Pacific war had not been the direct causes of the ending of the war, but they were two factors which enabled the Japanese leaders to bring the war to an end without internal chaos. The Japanese Army had been thinking of a fight to the last in the homeland. Premature efforts on the part of the Government to end the war while the people still believed they had a chance to win would have caused internal strife.

On 10th August, Tokyo Radio had broadcast the statement that Japan was willing to surrender, provided the Emperor’s prerogatives were not impaired by the terms. On the 11th the Swiss Legation in Washington had been informed that the American view on the position of Emperor Hirohito was that the Allied Military Commander of the occupation forces would control Japan through the Emperor. On the 14th the Japanese had agreed and President Truman at once announced the end of the war.

The formal surrender of Japan took place aboard the American battleship Missouri in Tokyo Bay on 2nd September, and occupation forces then began reducing Japan to military impotence by occupying the four main islands of Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu, and disarming the soldiers.

To the thousands of men serving in the islands north of Australia, the end of the war meant home and normal life again. The news was taken quietly in some squadrons, but for the most part it was celebrated with
great gusto. At the same time, the atomic bomb, with its terrible implications for the future, was in the thoughts of everyone.

The fighting was over but there was still much to be done. The First T.A.F. and other R.A.A.F. formations began to organise the succour and repatriation of prisoners of war held by the Japanese. This was an urgent task because thousands of them were starving and in need of medical attention. On 16th August, an Australian aircraft from Labuan flew over Kuching compound, dropping messages to prisoners and telling them of the Allied victory. Food, clothing and medical supplies followed. Catalinas flew 10,000 pounds of blood plasma, penicillin and quinine to the 5,000 Australians in Singapore, some 1,200 of whom were known to be in urgent need of medical attention. Late in August, plans were drawn up for the repatriation of the prisoners, time-expired servicemen and hospital “walking” cases from the islands to Australia.

The air force’s No. 2 Medical Air Evacuation Transport Unit was largely responsible for the evacuation of the prisoners. Members of this unit, headed by Wing Commander Game, left Morotai on 10th September, arriving at Singapore on the 12th. The following day, some ninety-five Australians were evacuated from Singapore to Labuan. On 14th September the unit began flying Australians from the Malayan peninsula, Sumatra, Burma and Siam into Singapore. At the end of September, twenty-four members of the R.A.A.F., mainly from No. 1 Squadron lost in Malaya and the N.E.I. in 1942, were recovered from Siam and brought into Singapore. As the prisoners were recovered and flown to Singapore, others were evacuated to Australia in Dakota and Catalina aircraft.

Parties of Australian nurses and medical orderlies often found the Japanese still in control when they arrived to take prisoners away. On the whole, the Japanese were cooperative and helped in the work of recovery. When the war ended they had gathered the prisoners into easily accessible centres. Many prisoners, however, were found to be in the final stages of starvation.

Difficulty was experienced in recovering prisoners from Indonesia where natives were showing hostility. It was very marked in Surabaya, where Senior Sister Budd, who flew there in an aircraft captained by Wing Commander Purvis, related how “all night long loaded lorries of whooping natives raged up and down the streets”. “It seems,” she said at the time, “that the Japanese have granted the native Indonesians right of free Government and they are greatly resenting the fact that their former white masters the Dutch are again to take over. So they have flown their flag from every vantage point, armed themselves with thick bamboo sticks—sharpened and sometimes steel-pointed—and are prepared to attack and eject every Dutchman who returns to re-establish himself in this town. . . .

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8 W Cdr J. A. Game, 281216. Staff Offr to DGMS RAAF 1941-44; Staff Offr Medical Adv RAAF Cd Morotai 1945. Senior RAAF Offr 2 Med Evac Unit 1945. Medical practitioner; of Adelaide; b. Launceston, Tas, 3 Jun 1915.

4 Senior Sister A. M. Budd, 500010. 2 RAAF Hospital and 2 Medical Air Evacuation Transport Unit. Nursing sister; of Rushworth, Vic; b. Kyabram, Vic, 8 Feb 1917.

6 W Cdr G. H. Purvis, AFC, 260446. 6 and 13 Sqs; comd 36 Sqn 1942-44. Airlines pilot; of Melbourne; b. Cobar, NSW, 16 May 1909.
The Japanese of course still controlling the place, provided us with transport and an armed guard to escort us into the city... On arrival we were informed that as the native population was in an angry mood no inmate of the hotel would be permitted out..."

Purvis flew on to Den Pasar, Bali, where he recovered eight Australians who had been in Japanese hands for up to three years. On the return flight Purvis was to pick up more ex-prisoners. The Japanese at Bali advised him not to land at Surabaya because the situation there had deteriorated. On 3rd October, Purvis took off from Den Pasar and flew over Surabaya. He noticed that, where two days earlier the Japanese had guarded the airfield, about 2,000 natives armed with spears were now swarming all over the airfield and the city streets, so he decided to return to Singapore without landing there.

The greater part of all prisoner evacuations in the South-East Asia and South-West Pacific areas were carried out by the R.A.A.F. By 13th October, all evacuations to Singapore had been completed. No. 2 Medical Air Unit alone carried out 7,801 evacuations, mostly to Singapore. Of this number, 5,319 were Australian, including 165 R.A.A.F.

Prisoners interned in Japan and Korea were brought to a reception camp at Manila before being repatriated to Australia by a shuttle service of R.A.A.F. Liberators. A few more prisoners were picked up in Borneo and Celebes by squadrons of First T.A.F. A large percentage of those repatriated from Japan were in good condition compared with those from other areas and after a fourteen-days' rest period and good meals at their camp near Manila, had improved to the extent of putting on as much as three stone in weight.

For the repatriation of members of the R.A.A.F. from the islands, Liberators of No. 82 Wing and Mitchells of No. 79 Wing were converted to transports. These aircraft and transport Dakotas did much of the work of repatriation, shipping being scarce and unpredictable.

Troops and airmen were flown direct from Morotai to the capital cities in one-day flights. In spite of the efforts of the air transport, however, men due for evacuation were becoming impatient and many lost interest in their service duties. In February 1946, this restlessness led to a minor disturbance and demonstration at No. 60 Operational Base Unit, Morotai. After the prisoners and medical cases, airmen were sent home in accordance with their assessment under a points system. This system unfortunately deprived the R.A.A.F. units in the islands of their more experienced men, with the result that efficiency was affected.

Some of the bomber squadrons returned in their own aircraft, but the fighter wings were brought back largely by Liberty ships and the British aircraft carrier, Glory.

On 19th September 1945, the War Cabinet had decided that Australia would contribute naval, army and air force units to a British force of occupation in Japan. This force was to be known as the "British Commonwealth Occupation Force" and would include units from the United
Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and India. By agreement with the United States it would go to Japan where it would come under the direction of General MacArthur, who had been appointed "Supreme Commander, Allied Powers". An Australian officer was to be appointed as the inter-Service commander-in-chief of this British force and most of the headquarters staff was to be provided by Australia. The Australian component of the force was to comprise two cruisers and two destroyers, one brigade group, and three R.A.A.F. Mustang fighter squadrons.

The initial area allotted to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force was the prefecture of Hiroshima and its role was defined as:

(a) The safeguarding of Allied installations and of all Japanese installations awaiting demilitarisation.

(b) The demilitarisation and disposal of all Japanese installations and armaments.

The air component of the occupation force was organised into a tactical group known as BCAIR (British Commonwealth Air Force) and included one single-engined fighter wing made up of two R.A.F. Spitfire squadrons and a squadron of Corsairs from the Royal New Zealand Air Force; one single-engined fighter wing comprising three R.A.A.F. Mustang squadrons and one squadron of the R.A.F. Regiment. R.A.A.F. Headquarters decided to allot No. 81 Wing with a total establishment of 1,750 persons as its contribution to the force. In anticipation of its move to Japan, the squadrons of the wing, Nos. 76, 77 and 82, then at Labuan, North Borneo, were re-equipped with Mustang aircraft.

Volunteers were called for the occupation force late in August 1945. The response was good, not only from within No. 81 Wing but from other units. Conversion training for both pilots and maintenance staff was carried out and was virtually completed by the end of November.

In preparation for the arrival of the wing in Japan, Air Commodore Scherger, the air force representative on a combined Services mission to Japan, went to Japan to inspect airfields which might be suitable for use by the force. He found that major construction work would be needed to place any one of the available airfields into serviceable condition. Since the American works units would be fully employed on the construction of their own airfields, it was decided to send No. 5 Airfield Construction Squadron to Japan and in November it was placed under the control of No. 81 Fighter Wing Headquarters and became a unit of the occupation force.

At the end of 1945, Air Vice-Marshal Bouchier, of the Royal Air Force, was appointed commander of BCAIR. He went to Japan with Lieut-General Northcott, the commander-in-chief of the British Commonwealth force, and decided to establish his headquarters and the majority of his flying squadrons at Iwakuni, in the Yamaguchi prefecture, southern Honshu. Iwakuni is about 450 miles west of Tokyo on the Inland Sea.

and was originally a Japanese naval air station. The main body of No. 81 Wing left Labuan by sea on 11th February for Japan, and later in the month the Mustang pilots commenced their move via the Philippines and Okinawa.

No. 76 Squadron R.A.A.F., commanded by Squadron Leader Wilson, was the first British squadron to move into Japan. It took off in two flights for the first stage of the trip on 28th February. On 9th March, after being held up for some days at Clark Field, Luzon, the first flight landed at Iwakuni and two days later moved on to Bofu where it was joined by the second flight which had flown there direct from Okinawa. On 2nd March twenty-five Mustangs of No. 82 Squadron, commanded by Squadron Leader Schaaf, left Labuan for Japan, arriving between 13th and 18th March. Three Mustangs of this squadron and an escorting Mosquito were lost within sixty miles of Bofu when extremely bad weather was encountered. The wreckage of two of these Mustangs and the bodies of the pilots were recovered later from Shikoku Island. The Mustangs of No. 77 Squadron, led by Squadron Leader Curtis, arrived at Bofu on 21st March. The units of No. 81 Wing flew surveillance patrols over Yamaguchi, Hiroshima, Tottori, and Shimane prefectures and Shikoku Island. They kept a watch on the movements of vessels in the Inland Sea and Tsushima Strait to check the smuggling of aliens into the country, especially Koreans, who made for Hiroshima. In 1949, Nos. 76 and 82 Squadrons were withdrawn to Australia, leaving only No. 77 Squadron in Japan when, in June 1950, the Korean war began.

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When the war ended the total number of Australians serving in the R.A.A.F. was 154,511, of whom 137,208 were serving in the South-West Pacific theatre. The total casualties suffered by the R.A.A.F. in the war against Japan were 2,020 killed, 886 wounded, and 417 prisoners of war.8

This volume has recorded the history of the R.A.A.F. in the Pacific War and Burma in the years 1943, 1944 and 1945. Its operations in the Pacific were directed by an American air corps general who kept his own Fifth Air Force concentrated and used the Australian squadrons on his flanks (in eastern New Guinea and North-Western Area) and on anti-submarine operations around the Australian coast. The Fifth Air Force was consequently not only more concentrated in its deployment but, on the whole, equipped with better aircraft. While this policy prevented the R.A.A.F. from concentrating on the maintenance of a single strong field formation, the R.A.A.F. nevertheless contributed to the over-all success of the operations in 1943 and early 1944 which were directed towards the breaking of the Bismarcks barrier. The isolation of Rabaul, which took twelve months to accomplish, was a major strategic defeat for the Japanese. It was not so much that the enemy forces had lost an outer defensive bastion, but that in defending it they had expended aircraft and aircrews, naval and merchant shipping which they were never able to replace. The Japanese after the war were unanimous that their defeat round Rabaul was a result of their loss of air superiority.

While No. 9 Operational Group R.A.A.F. played an important part in this campaign, other Australian squadrons based in the Darwin area played a valuable role by defending MacArthur's flank. The enemy had a large army supported by an air force based in the islands north of Darwin in anticipation of an invasion from Darwin which never came.

In the final phase of the war the R.A.A.F.'s part, though it had wide ramifications, was again predominantly a flank-protection role, followed by garrison duties, and the invasion of Borneo. After a period in which the squadrons of No. 10 Group were used to cover invasion points along the north New Guinea coast, the R.A.A.F. was given a task under the direction of the Thirteenth Air Force to assist in neutralising the enemy in Dutch New Guinea, Halmahera and Celebes. The spirits of some of the pilots slumped, believing, as they did, that the targets they were called on to attack were not worthwhile, but, with the mounting of the Borneo operations, discontent passed and the squadrons carried out that support role with skill and much improved spirits.

After 1943 the air war in which the R.A.A.F. was engaged in the South-West Pacific was not an air war in the sense of two opposing air forces clashing in battle over each other's bases. In the last twelve months very few enemy aircraft appeared over or near R.A.A.F. bases. In the

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8 Because of the absence of anti-aircraft defences and strong concentrations of fighters on the scale encountered in the European theatres, air force casualties were relatively less heavy in the Pacific. In Europe and the Middle East the R.A.A.F. lost 6,612 killed, 1,374 wounded and 1,459 prisoners of war.
thousands of sorties flown by First Tactical Air Force in the last nine months of action, only five contacts were made with enemy airborne aircraft. The three Spitfire squadrons of No. 80 Wing, whose primary job was fighter defence against raiding enemy aircraft, shot down only three enemy aircraft—one at Morotai, one at Labuan and one at Balikpapan. Contact with enemy aircraft by Spitfires had been made only three times.

The infrequent meeting of R.A.A.F. aircraft and the enemy air forces in the last two years of the war was a result largely of the weakness of the enemy air force. After 1943 the Japanese air force had gone downhill rapidly. There is a danger that lessons might be drawn from the closing victorious years when everything was running smoothly, rather than from the difficult defensive early years. In 1947 Lord Tedder warned against this tendency. He said:

The campaign is immensely simplified for a commander if he knows he can count on a blank cheque. Surely it is the problems of the early stages of the war which we should study. Those are the difficult problems; those are the practical problems which we and every democratic nation have to solve. There were no big battalions or blank cheques then. Here is the real and vital test of our defence policies. It is at the outset of war that time is the supreme factor.9

In the Pacific the R.A.A.F. had its first experience of a war in which its own integrated formations took part. Thousands of Australian airmen served in England, the Middle East and Burma, but although nominally in the R.A.A.F. they served in battle as part of the R.A.F., either individually or in squadrons. In the Pacific, however, the R.A.A.F. organised operational groups and later a Tactical Air Force, as well as the area formations, and Australian officers gained experience in organising and directing large air formations in war. The R.A.A.F. suffered from mistakes made in this theatre but at the same time it built up a body of knowledge and experience which might prove most valuable in the future.

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