BLAMEY

The Biography of Field Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey

JOHN HETHERINGTON

BLA..

by

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This is the long-awaited full, frank and uncensored story of the man who was possibly the greatest soldier Australia has bred; he was without doubt the most controversial.

John Hetherington, a writer and journalist of world repute, has not concealed Blamey's defects or magnified his qualities of greatness. Thus his book is a living portrait of a soldier of uncommon gifts and a man of infinite complexity; an intricate combination of simplicity and sophistication, of kindliness and ruthlessness, of frailty and strength.

But the book is more than just the life of one man. It brings to life Blamey's campaigns in the Middle East and New Guinea, in which hundreds of thousands of Australians participated.

Illustrated with photographs of great historical interest.

The portrait on the jacket is from a painting by William Dargie, in the possession of the Commercial Travellers' Association of Victoria.

BLAMEY

By the same author

AIRBORNE INVASION: THE STORY OF THE BATTLE OF CRETE
AUSTRALIAN SOLDIER
THE WINDS ARE STILL (*a novel*)

BLAMEY

The biography of Field-Marshal
SIR THOMAS BLAMEY

by
JOHN HETHERINGTON

F. W. CHESHIRE
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For

MATT HALTON

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I have not attempted to present here any detailed account of the strategy or tactics of the late Field-Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey's campaigns. My aim has been to portray Blamey the man, of whom Blamey the soldier was but one expression, however important. Acting on this principle, I have described only such aspects of Blamey's campaigns as appear to me to throw light on the character of the man. Any attempt to examine the operations as a whole would be to usurp a prerogative of the military historian, without serving the purposes of the biographer. The result would be only to fog the portrait.

It would be wearisome if I were to print a list of the names of the men and women, more than a hundred in all, who gave me, or guided me to, information for this book. Indeed, many of my informants agreed to discuss Blamey with me only on my undertaking not to identify them as having contributed a share to the narrative. However, I cannot refrain from expressing here my thanks to Lady Blamey, Mr. T. R. Blamey, and Mr. John Wilmoth, executors of the late Sir Thomas Blamey's estate, for having given me access to his papers; to Mr J. C. Blamey, of Sydney, for the unstinting help he gave me in my effort to reconstruct the scenes of his brother's youth; to Major James McGrath, Director of the Australian War Memorial, Canberra, and his staff; to Mr. Gavin Long, General Editor of the Australian Official War History, and his staff; to Mr. Eugene Gorman, M.C., Q.C., of Melbourne, and Mr. Harry Alderman, Q.C., of Adelaide, each of whom read the typescript of this book and gave me valuable advice upon it; and, above all, to Mr. Norman Carlyon, of Melbourne. Mr. Carlyon, who served Blamey throughout most of the war, successively as *aide-de-camp*, Personal Assistant, and Military Assistant, spent many hours in helping me to shape the biography. I could not have done the task without his aid. His patience was infinite.

JOHN HETHERINGTON

A LETTER TO THE AUTHOR

Mr. Gavin Long, General Editor of the Australian Official War History, wrote the following letter to the author of *Blamey* while, under the title of *The Blamey Papers*, an abridged version was in course of publication as a newspaper serial:

Dear John,

May I offer my congratulations on *The Blamey Papers*. I am sure it is having the success it deserves in its present form, and will have a second round of applause when it becomes a book. A living person and, I am sure, a real one—the real one—is emerging, and it must give you special satisfaction to know that you are helping to do justice to a big Australian whose stature few Australians have fully appreciated. I must confess that my estimate of him has steadily risen since I began this job.

If I may say so I think your handling of the several really sticky patches has been admirably fair and balanced; and it is all too easy, when condensing a complex story, told in a fat bundle of interlocking documents, to be less than just to one or other of the people involved.

Yours sincerely,

GAVIN LONG

Canberra, A.C.T.

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All the illustrations come from the files of the Australian War Memorial to whom the author's thanks are due for permission to reproduce them.

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RE-BIRTH OF A SOLDIER

1

When Neville Chamberlain flew to Munich and signed the "peace in our time" agreement with Adolf Hitler on September 30, 1938, Tom Blamey was fifty-four years old.

At that time it would have been hard to name among Australia's senior soldiers a less likely popular candidate for command of the nation's military forces. Blamey had retired from the permanent Army thirteen years earlier to become Victoria's Chief Commissioner of Police. He had resigned this post after the return of an adverse finding by a Royal Commission appointed to investigate the circumstances surrounding the shooting of one of his senior officers, Superintendent John Brophy.

The road was rough for Blamey in the next two years. Men who had been eager to dine and drink with him in his days as Chief of Police melted away; some of them looked past him in the street. A comparative handful of old friends continued to seek his company when the weather turned foul. The Victorian Government had granted him a pension of £5 a week, and two or three investments he had made added perhaps £200 a year to his income. But his financial circumstances were, to say the least, straitened. Early in 1938, a Melbourne commercial radio station, 3UZ, offered him £4/4/- a week for a regular Sunday night broadcast on the rising danger of a second world war. Two considerations made him seize the offer. One was a desire to make his voice heard on the world's peril. The second was his need of the extra money.

But for all the satisfaction he derived from making these broadcasts, Blamey lived through many bitter hours in his outcast years. It was harsh enough to be light in pocket, on the beach, without prospects. It was harsher to be confronted by the backs of men he had counted as friends. Whatever his flaws of character, Blamey possessed one quality in extravagant measure: a capacity for loyalty to his friends. At times his loyalty was misplaced. More than once he paid the penalty for his blind support, in the teeth of reason, of this man or

that. For such a man the personal betrayals he suffered after resigning the police chief's post were more than ordinarily cruel.

A few hours before he resigned, he told Eugene Gorman, K.C., who was acting as one of his legal advisers, that he had no cause to worry about the immediate future, because many influential people had promised to see that he should suffer no financial loss through his battle with the Government.

"H'm," said the sceptical and worldly-wise Gorman. "My advice to you is to get these things they've promised while the tears are still in their eyes."

Blamey ignored Gorman's advice, and lived to regret it. Once the police chief's door closed behind him he was nearly, if not quite, a forgotten man. At fifty-two he faced the world with slender resources, few prospects, but a touching faith in the assurances supposed friends had given him in the hour of crisis. At fifty-four the nature of his resources and prospects remained unchanged, but his faith was battered. Of course, a few men stood to Blamey's side in his time of adversity, and these men he would never forget. But their number was wonderfully few.

It was not easy for him to find some means of increasing his modest income. He was qualified to earn a living only at soldiering, which was closed to him in peacetime, and school-teaching, which he had abandoned three decades earlier. His talents as an organiser in a military appointment, or any post akin to it, were unsurpassed; but such talents are not easy to sell in the every-day market. His native instinct for business was, though he would have scorned such an imputation, modest. His more astute friends were continually dissuading him from snatching at the lure of wildcat commercial ventures whose pitfalls he could not see.

Politically he was something of an untouchable. To Labour, he represented reaction, for no well-defined reason, except that he was a member of the "military caste," whatever that might mean. He was suspected of fascist leanings, at a time when fascism was making its ugly presence felt in the world. He trifled with the prospect of entering politics under the banner of the United Australia Party, whose platform suited his inherently conservative instincts. The U.A.P. gave him little encouragement. He offered himself for preselection as U.A.P. candidate for a Victorian Federal electorate, and was beaten. To be frank, he was a bad risk. The party managers felt there was a bit of an aroma about Blamey.

Among his assets was the reputation he had won as the late Lieutenant-General Sir John Monash's chief of staff in the First World War. Monash, Australian Corps commander on the Western Front

from May, 1918, to the end of the war, wrote of Blamey in his book *The Australian Victories in France in 1918*: "He possessed a mind cultured far above the average, widely informed, alert, and prehensile." Even his most earnest detractors could not deny the sweep of his achievements in the first war. He had finished it as a thirty-four-year-old brigadier-general, with a name known far beyond the Australian Corps for industry, intelligence, and creative imagination in the exacting field of staff work. But a military reputation was of little practical value to Blamey now. He had closed the Army's door on himself when he retired to enter the Police Department. It was no affair of the Army's if the path he had chosen had led to a dead-end. Other men, younger men, had risen in the Army since Blamey's day. They could not be expected to step aside, even if the Defence Act would have permitted such self-immolation, so that Blamey could solve his problem by returning to the Army. And there were many able officers of the regular Army who questioned Blamey's professional qualifications to hold a senior post in the new war that was looming. It was true that he had been an admirable right-hand man to Monash, true that he had not forsaken his studies of military science when he exchanged khaki for blue. Between 1926 and 1937 he had, as a militia officer, commanded the 10th Infantry Brigade and the 3rd Division in Victoria, thus keeping the rust from his sword. But new military techniques had been devised since Blamey was at the zenith of his powers at the end of the first war. The brilliant staff officer of 1918 might well prove to be out-moded twenty years later. Soldiering is a hard trade.

The professionals, or most of them at least, held that no man could learn what had to be learned of military developments, the evolution of tactics, the handling of new weapons, the ever-increasing complexities of supply, by playing the game at Saturday afternoon parades, weekend exercises, and yearly camps. This was well enough, they said, for junior officers, non-commissioned officers and men; it was insufficient for the making of senior commanders.

So until the late months of 1938 the future looked bleak for Blamey. A proud man, he held his head high. A legend that he had inherited a substantial fortune left by his first wife, who had died in 1935, helped him to preserve the facade of affluence; the truth was that Lady Blamey had left £1,534/17/5.

If Blamey had been a man of weaker spirit, he might have believed himself finished. It was symptomatic of the toughness of his fibre that he never did abandon hope of a better tomorrow. And though he was unaware of it, three or four men in public office had their eyes on him. These men had seen the writing on the wall grow more menacing as Japan became restive in the Far East, as Italy overthrew Abyssinia,

as Germany and Italy joined the Francoists in the destruction of the Spanish Republic, as Czechoslovakia was dismembered after the Munich deal. They knew that Australia could not hold aloof from the world war that must come. They looked about them for a man trained in the military craft who would be capable of leading Australia's land forces in the event of war. The more they studied the want the more deeply they were impressed with Blamey's qualifications to supply it.

Lieutenant-General E. K. Squires, Inspector-General of the Australian Military Forces from June, 1938, was automatically disqualified by frail health and the fact that, as a British officer, he would have been an infelicitous choice to lead Australians into battle. Some of the younger Australian Staff Corps officers, potential leaders of high quality, were too inexperienced for the most senior commands. Older officers, though some possessed excellent attributes, failed to surmount the hurdle on the score of personality or for other reasons unrelated to pure military capacity.

So Blamey's star was, unknown to him, rising in the darkness.

2

One of the men who, in his own mind, had selected Blamey for the senior war-time command was not a close personal friend, though he and Blamey had known one another, with mutual respect, for many years. Their acquaintanceship had begun before the first war when Blamey, then an officer of the Administrative and Instructional Staff, had been an instructor at a school cadet camp at Maryborough, Victoria. Among the cadets who sprang to obey his commands (and, incidentally, sniggered the day Blamey stepped backwards, caught his heel on a tent peg, and went sprawling on the grass) was a Kyneton youth named Fred Shedden. In the years since then Shedden, who had served with the First A.I.F. and gained the rank of lieutenant, had risen to be Secretary of the Department of Defence. He believed Blamey possessed most of the qualities an Australian national commander required. The problem, after Munich, was to get Blamey back into the Australian arena of defence.

A Manpower Committee was created by the Australian Government in September, 1938. It had the task of supervising the preparation of a National Register, as a first step in stripping Australia for war action. A full-time chairman was required, and Shedden proposed to Cabinet that Blamey, "whose military experience and proved organising ability would be most valuable," should be appointed. So Blamey came out of his backwater. The post carried a salary of £1,500 a year, which was, to Blamey, more than handsome after over two

years in which he had had to think twice before indulging a taste for even the simplest extravagance. More important, his dented faith in himself, not to mention his faith in the promise of the future, was restored. A man would have had to be unperceptive not to sense the implications of the appointment. And Blamey was never lacking in perception.

About the same time a Recruiting Secretariat was formed, under the chairmanship of the dogmatic and explosive W. M. Hughes, a foundation member of the Commonwealth Parliament, and Australia's Prime Minister for the greater part of the First World War. Hughes had never had the smallest liking for Blamey. But once more Shedden's advice prevailed with Cabinet. Blamey was appointed Controller-General of the Secretariat, as well as Manpower chairman.

Yet even then there was no certainty that he was marked out to command Australia's wartime military forces. J. A. Lyons, the Prime Minister of the day, had agreed to Shedden's proposals with private reservations. Lyons had never met Blamey, but he had heard a lot about him, and he did not much like what he had heard. Lyons, a devout Roman Catholic and an exemplary family man, doubted that Blamey had the moral qualities required to lead Australia's soldiers into battle. Certain of Blamey's admirers in the Federal Government had no such doubts. R. G. Menzies, Lyons' Attorney-General, had known Blamey for many years. As a member of the Victorian Parliament, and a Minister on several occasions between 1929 and 1934, he had had personal experience of Blamey's powers of organisation and leadership as police chief. No less convinced of Blamey's conspicuous fitness for the task ahead were R. G. Casey, who was Lyons' Treasurer, and Sir Henry Gullett. Gullett, who was dissatisfied with the Government's defence preparations, was at that time a private member; but he wielded appreciable influence with a section of the Party. He and Casey were both old soldiers of the first war. Casey had served alongside and, in 1918, directly under Blamey. He had won the D.S.O. and the M.C., and his record for both gallantry and ability was irreproachable. Gullett, who had enlisted as a gunner, had served later as a war correspondent, and was the author of a volume of Australia's official war history.

Casey's personal knowledge of Blamey's military abilities was second to no man's. He knew Blamey as, above all, a realist who would not be intoxicated by success or intimidated by disaster. In the first war Casey was brigade major of the 8th Brigade for a long time, including the period of the savage, and costly, Passchendaele fighting on the Western Front in 1917. Writhing under the thought of the

apparently useless Passchendaele blood-letting, he unburdened himself to Blamey, who was then G.S.O. I of the the 1st Division.

"God alive, sir," he said, "who's responsible for this Passchendaele campaign? This is the most dreadful blot on the whole of our British set-up."

He said much more, and Blamey heard him to the end. When he was done, Blamey said:

"Well, you have said all that! What are you going to do about it?"

"I can't do anything about it, sir," Casey replied.

"Well," said Blamey, "if you can't do anything about a thing, why talk about it!"

Casey suspected that this was the type of spirit that would be needed in a commander who had to fight the war which was inevitable after Munich.

Casey was one of the few men who had refused to turn their backs on Blamey when he fell on evil days. When critics suggested that Blamey was too fond of the bottle, Casey always mentioned Ulysses Grant, the American Civil War general, whom Abraham Lincoln once defended against a similar charge by retorting that he wished he knew where Grant got his whisky: he would like to prescribe some of it for some of his other generals! A few weeks after Blamey left the police force a group of friends gave him a dinner at the Naval and Military Club, Melbourne. Casey made a short speech. The theme of it was: "Tom Blamey will do me!" Now, with war threatening, Casey considered that Tom Blamey would do Australia. He and Gullett put their heads together. Each believed Australia would have to appoint a commander-in-chief in the looming war; each believed Blamey was the only man for the post.

Casey went to Lyons. Lyons, though a sunny-natured, broadminded man, could be stubborn when he had formed an opinion. He shook his head when Casey mentioned Blamey.

"No, I don't want anything to do with him," he said. "I've heard some funny things about Blamey. . . . Anyway, what about the senior people we have in the Army now?"

"We've some brilliant staff officers," Casey told him. "But Blamey is a commander. That's the difference! . . . And, Joe, you don't know Blamey! It isn't like you to judge a man without having met him."

"No," Lyons said. "No. I don't like what I've heard about Blamey."

Casey admitted temporary defeat—but with a private resolve that he had not spoken his last word to Lyons on the subject. He persisted whenever a chance offered itself, and at last Lyons agreed, without enthusiasm, to meet Blamey. Casey invited Blamey to Can-

berra, took him to Lyons, and left them together. When their talk was over, the Prime Minister was bubbling with excitement. He had felt, in no uncertain way, the impact of Blamey's personality.

"My word, Dick, he's somebody, isn't he!" Lyons enthused. "He's really somebody!"

"Of course he is, Joe," Casey replied. "Blamey is big! He's a commander!"

"I believe you," Lyons said. "You've really done something, bringing him up here."

From that day Blamey's place in the forefront of the part Australia was to play in at least the opening phase of the Second World War was in no doubt. Lyons died in office on April 7, 1939, nearly five months before Australia declared war on Germany; but his successor, Menzies, did not need to be converted to a recognition of Blamey's quality. On September 28, 1939, Blamey was appointed General Officer Commanding the 6th Division.

The stoutish, ageing Blamey, a mere 5ft 6½in. tall, with his dark hair and clipped moustache beginning to turn grey, was as far removed physically as a man could be from the "typical Digger" of poetic tradition—the lean, lounging, hard-bitten fellow with a home-spun aphorism forever on the tip of his tongue. This hardly mattered, since most of the men he was to command also bore astonishingly little resemblance to this conception.

What did matter was that the outcast had ended his term in the wilderness. A soldier was reborn.

2

THE BOY FROM WAGGA WAGGA

1

RICHARD and Margaret Blamey's seventh child was born in a comfortable, if modest, house on the shores of Lake Albert, four miles from the New South Wales town of Wagga Wagga, on January 24, 1884. The wrinkle-faced infant was their fourth son, and they gave him the names of Thomas Albert, never guessing at the brilliant and turbulent life before him, or that his hands would one day carry a British field-marshal's baton. They had no worldly riches to give him, but he inherited from his Cornish father and Scottish-Australian mother a strong body, a tough constitution, and an intelligent mind. He inherited also the fighting spirit which had impelled them to go out into the Australian bush as pioneers.

In 1862, as a lad of sixteen, Richard Blamey had said farewell to his widowed mother and his sister in Newquay, Cornwall, and taken passage to Brisbane in the Yankee-built Black Ball clipper *Flying Cloud*. After working for some years as a Queensland cattleman, he had taken up a grazing property, *Oon Yuan*, in the sparsely settled Charleville district. There he had met twenty-two-year-old Margaret Murray, on a visit from her native New South Wales to her uncle, Donald Mackay's, station property. The muscular young cattleman swept Margaret off her feet, and, in September, 1871, they rode the sixty miles into Charleville and were married.

Except when Margaret went to Roma to have her first baby, she did not lay eyes on a single white woman in her first two years at *Oon Yuan*. Her only companions of her own sex were black gins. Even as more settlers came to the region, she was not embarrassed by white women's society. A visit to the nearest neighbour meant a rough ride of many miles on horseback. But it was a valuable schooling for a bush wife. It sharpened Margaret's self-reliance. She learned to swing a Dutch hoe in defence of her children and herself against such marauders as venomous snakes; and at least once against a drunken man who lurched on to the front porch when her husband was from home, and made off at an alcoholic gallop with the Dutch hoe slashing

at his back. To the Blamey children, the Dutch hoe was the symbol of their mother's unconquerable soul.

The Blameys hoped to make a fortune at *Oon Yuan*, but Fate was against them. Drought forced them to sell in 1878. They decided to make a fresh start at Wagga Wagga, on the banks of the Murrumbidgee River, some three hundred miles south-west of Sydney. There they settled on *Yarragundry*, a beautiful five-thousand-acre riverside property. But once more their luck was out. Drought, bush fires, and low cattle prices defeated them. *Yarragundry* had to go.

They moved to Lake Albert, and became one more family unit in a community of settlers whose men turned their hands to any kind of work that offered and did a little primitive farming on the side. Richard Blamey took over a twenty-acre paddock, collected a plant of horses, and set himself up as a contract drover. He also worked in the shearing season as a shed overseer at any of the big neighbourhood properties. It was something of a come-down, after *Oon Yuan* and *Yarragundry*, but at least his earnings kept his growing family well fed and decently clothed.

This was the home into which Thomas Albert Blamey was born on January 24, 1884.

2

Young Tom Blamey lived his childhood and adolescence in the closing years of an era in which the British Empire's might was unchallenged and appeared to be unchallengeable.

On the day he was born, the *Wagga Advertiser* printed an item of news telegraphed from London, which announced that Major-General (Chinese) Gordon had left for Khartoum "to induce the Arabs to detach themselves from the Mahdi and his followers." This piece of news does not appear to have caused any stir in the Wagga Wagga of 1884, or, for that matter, in Australia at large. More than a year was to pass before Gordon was to die when, on January 26, 1885, the Mahdi's forces stormed beleaguered Khartoum. Not until then did New South Wales raise a contingent of one six-gun battery, five hundred and twenty-two infantry, and two hundred horses, and ship them off to lend a hand in the Sudan trouble. It was Australia's first military expedition.

But Wagga Waggans, like Australians in general, were engrossed in their own affairs, in their country's progress toward nationhood from its status as a collection of disconnected pioneering colonies. They had little time to concern themselves with a quarrel between Great Britain and a parcel of coloured mischief-makers who more

than likely wore loincloths and had certainly never known the benefits of Christianity. Australia had no call to worry about international upheavals. Nothing of the kind could ever touch the people of this land. True, each of the Australian colonies, as the States were then called, maintained its own military establishment; but nobody took these token armies too seriously. It would be to Britain's strong arm that Australians would look for protection if ever the need should arise.

And there were affairs of greater moment on hand than armed conflicts in foreign parts. For all their dependence on Britain, Australians were restive for a stronger voice in the shaping of their own destiny. Men like Henry Parkes, the Warwickshire labourer's son, were talking insistently of an idea called Federation, which was steadily winning converts. No intelligent boy could have lived through this period and not been influenced by the talk he heard in his parents' home, by the political speeches reported at length in the daily Press. Young Tom listened and read, and revolved these new ideas in his mind. It was in these years that his Australianism was born, a fierce Australianism which was to colour many of his actions in later life. At the fireside on winter nights, or curled in the shadows of the broad veranda on long hot summer evenings, he listened to the stories told by his father and mother of their pioneering struggles in Queensland, and later at *Yarragundry*. So he found pride in the grandeur, the bigness, the promise of his native land.

The Blameys were good Wesleyans. They lost no time in having each new baby christened, and within a month of his birth Tom was christened in the Lake Albert house by the Rev. Henry W. T. Pincombe, the Wesleyan minister in Wagga Wagga. The whole family were members of the Church; as well, the Blamey children belonged to the Sunday school. When they were living at the lake they made the journey, morning, afternoon, and evening of each Sunday, packed into a double buggy, with Richard Blamey at the reins. About 1892 Tom sat for a State-wide examination for Wesleyan Sunday school pupils. When the results came out five Wagga Waggans had passed. Four were Blameys. And 91 per cent., top marks for the five, had been awarded to eight-year-old Tom. When his Sunday school days ended he joined the Bible class; and at seventeen graduated as a "local" preacher, and was conducting afternoon services in small country centres administered by the Wagga Wagga church.

It was Tom's father, an outdoor man, who nurtured the boy's love of the outdoors and wild life. It was his mother, a woman of naturally cultured mind, who woke his love of less earthy things. In fact, his mother's influence was the strongest he was to know at least until he

grew to manhood. It was perhaps the strongest human influence of his whole life. In later years, when Tom was a meagrely paid school-teacher in Western Australia, he was to stint himself of necessities so that he could save the money for his fare home in the Christmas holidays, chiefly to see his mother.

Even in tender years young Tom displayed an incipient martial instinct. It is true that any small boy of Anglo-Saxon stock who did not, in those days of Britain's supreme military might, play with tin soldiers, was almost a freak. But Tom's way with tin soldiers, even when he was four or five years old, was far from juvenile. He was not content, like most small boys, to array a force of cavalry and foot, then mow them down with two or three cannon-balls. He would deploy his opposing forces so that one or the other was in a militarily perilous position, and endeavour to extricate it with a minimum of losses. He did not welcome advice on the solving of such self-created problems from his father or older brothers: he insisted on finding an answer unaided. Thus, his taste for generalship first expressed itself.

The Blameys were friendly with a family named Cameron. One of the Cameron daughters Mary, later to win fame as Dame Mary Gilmore, Australian poet and writer, was then a young school-teacher, and Tom came under her hand in the infants' class at Wagga Wagga. When his sixth birthday was approaching, Mary's father told Richard Blamey that he would like to buy the boy a gift.

"Thank you," said Richard Blamey. "But not soldiers! Please, not soldiers! He has them in hundreds."

Blamey, senior, did not dream that one day his son would have soldiers, and not tin soldiers, in hundreds of thousands.

Families, especially in the country, had to make most of their own entertainment in those days. Young Tom is still remembered as a talented elocutionist of the Blamey family circle. He knew all "Banjo" Paterson's jingling poems by heart, and would recite *The Man From Snowy River* at the slightest encouragement. He had to satisfy his appetite for reading with books from the Sunday school library, with daily newspapers, with copies of English periodicals sent to the Blameys by friends in the Old Country. He devoured every printed word he could find. A custom arose among the Blamey children, when they were helping with the kitchen chores after the evening meal, of each, in turn, paraphrasing for the benefit of the others the story of any book he had just read. Even at seven or eight young Tom, while Lily washed the dishes and he and Jim wiped them, showed the beginnings of a deftness with words which he was to develop, in his maturity, into a precise and forceful instrument of expression.

But the shortish, strongly made, dark-haired boy, though reserved even then, was no milksop. The Blameys were educated at the Superior Public School, in Wagga Wagga. And there you had to be ready to fight for your rights if someone challenged them. Most of the school fights were held in the town saleyards, and Tom figured in his fair share of them. Over half a century later his brother Jim still had vivid recollections of a bare-knuckle scrap, originating in a dispute over marbles, between nine-year-old Tom and a youth two years older, three inches taller, and many pounds heavier. Tom had not won the fight, but he was far from having lost it, when authority, in the person of a master named "Darby" Pike, appeared, and combatants and spectators fled.

Tom took a lively part in the robust games played in the school-grounds or the paddock next door, whether cockfighting, fly-the-garter, or saddle-me-nag. Since he was agile and fleet of foot, he was also a handy member of organised games teams. At school he played Australian Rules football. When rugby came to Wagga Wagga about 1900 he switched his allegiance to the new code, and quickly developed into a useful centre three-quarter. In Western Australia later he reverted to Australian Rules, and also tried his arm with some success at lacrosse.

The Blameys had moved from Lake Albert into a house in Wagga Wagga when Tom was three. Floods drove them twice from this home; each time they had to escape with what possessions they could hurriedly gather and pack into a spring-cart. Blamey, snr., sick of these flights to safety whenever the Murrumbidgee was swollen with winter rains, moved to a new home on twenty-eight acres on the Urana road. From here the children had to walk three miles each way to school in Wagga Wagga. But they were happy in the new home; especially the boys, because the nearest neighbour was one Darcy, an expert horseman and horse-breaker.

All the Blamey boys were good with horses. They had to be. As each grew old enough, he was expected to help with the droving plant; and in the season lend a hand in the shearing-shed, in some such acolyte's office as that of tar-boy. Young Tom served his apprentice-ship with the rest. So he was grounded in the esoterics of country life, including horsemanship, in his tenderest years. He was never an elegant horseman, but there was no horse he feared. Perhaps his way with horses was the earliest expression of his will to command. He also had an abiding love of horses and a deep understanding of them. Tom and his brother Jim, only three years apart in age, were close friends. They haunted Darcy, and picked up from him many

of the finer points of horse-handling and horse-breaking. Jim was willing enough when there was an awkward horse to be ridden, but Tom had all the gameness of a horseman born. He would test himself on any mount Darcy produced, often a pig-rooter, now and then a genuine outlaw. Thrown, he would roll clear of the flying hoofs, pick himself up, knock the dust from his clothing, and try again. He had a long and dogged fight with a brown pony, who knew every trick of unseating a rider. But Tom mastered him in the end. It was a proud day when, mounted on the brown, he rode off with his father to drove a mob of cattle to the sales at Wodonga, eighty miles away on the Victorian side of the Murray—a trip he made more than once before he was fourteen, as a member of the Blamey droving plant.

Tom learned early to stand, without anyone else's help, on the feet which were to carry him through his successful, but often stormy, life. An urgent message for his father arrived one day at the Blamey home. Richard Blamey was a hundred and thirty miles away on the Upper Murray, and thirteen-year-old Tom was the only one of his sons at hand. He saddled up and set out, making his way to his father's side over country rough enough to test any man's horsemanship.

It was a hard, healthy life that the Blamey children, their number increased to ten by the birth of three more daughters since Tom's coming, lived. Mostly they found their fun in such simple pastimes as roaming the hills, which Tom and Jim often did together, armed with a pea-rifle or their father's old single-barrelled muzzle-loader gun. Tom was handy with the muzzle-loader. As a fifteen-year-old he came home one day to find an Indian hawker annoying his mother and sisters. He rammed a charge into the muzzle-loader, walked through the front doorway, presented the gun at the Indian's head, and said: "Quick, before I shoot!" The Indian bolted.

And sometimes there was a moonlight concert in the racecourse saddling-paddock, a minstrel show in the Oddfellows' Hall, or a visit by some theatre celebrity like Maggie Moore in a stage success of the times. One travelling troupe included among its acts a clairvoyant demonstration by a certain Miss Kate Russell. She invited members of the audience to the platform, and Tom went up with other hopeful Wagga Waggans. She asked each subject to lend her some personal possession, then told his fortune in potted form. Tom handed her a handkerchief. She held it for a few seconds, then exclaimed: "Oh, what a career lies before you! You will cross the seas many times."

Miss Kate Russell would seem to have been a more gifted clairvoyant than any of her audience guessed.

3

Tom was a member of the cadet corps at the Superior Public School, but there is no evidence that in school-days he trifled with the idea of a military career.

True, like many another young Australian of the time, he was caught up by the desire to fight, and if need be die, for Queen and country, not to mention the lure of finding adventure in a far land, which accompanied the events leading to the outbreak of the South African War in 1899. About the middle of 1899 items of London news about "the Transvaal crisis" began appearing almost daily in the sober columns of the *Wagga Advertiser*. It soon became obvious that Britain would have to do something to put a spoke in the wheel of those damn' Boers. And not only Britain. Australia was not yet federated, and each of the six Australian colonies had its own Department of Defence, working independently of each other and usually under the command of a British senior officer; but with trouble looming for the Empire, the six colonies were unanimous that Australians must carry their share of the fight. In the event, each colony sent a contingent to South Africa.

When New South Wales called for volunteers scores of young Wagga Waggans offered themselves at the recruiting depot. The first hurdle they had to pass was an interview with Staff-Sergeant Tubman, a saddler by trade and a part-time soldier by choice. Jim and Tom Blamey, eighteen and fifteen respectively, decided they could not miss this opportunity of seeing the world. Jim took his stand before Tubman's table first. Tubman tweaked his dark moustache and asked Jim the routine questions. Jim, lying patriotically, gave his age as twenty. Tubman raised his brows, and told Jim to stand aside. Tubman tweaked his moustache even harder when Tom came forward. Tom, also lying patriotically, gave his age as eighteen. Tubman's brows shot really high.

"You two boys go home and grow up," he ordered, adding a few more observations about the Army's need of grown men, not youngsters hardly out of their mother's lap.

Tom, who was to become the foremost Australian soldier of his day, and Jim crept home, their dreams of military glory shattered. It must have been a sad moment for the Blamey boys when, on the night of Monday, October 23, every Wagga Waggan who could find a place in the Town Hall joined in saying a public farewell, with speeches, and a programme of recitations and songs "of a martial character" to the six local men selected as members of the New South Wales contingent for South Africa.

For Tom, it was back to school-teaching. At the end of his school-days he had passed the New South Wales Education Department examination for a "pupil-teacher." He was appointed to the Lake Albert school, and began his career there when the school year opened in 1899. Lake Albert was a small school attended by forty or so children of neighbouring settlers and staffed by a head teacher and a pupil-teacher. Fifty years later older pupils remembered Blamey as a short, stocky, black-haired youth, with a natural air of command. He taught the junior classes, and enforced discipline with a firm hand and a firm voice. He usually rode to school on a chestnut mare his father had bought for 27/6 as a brumby. The mare was a weedy youngster, but she had a fiery heart, and took a deal of breaking. She grew up into a splendid animal, and Tom, cantering to school in the somewhat odd garb, for an equestrian, of dark suit and straw boater, was proud of her.

About the beginning of 1901 he was transferred to the staff of the New Town (South Wagga) Public School. Half a dozen or so older boys were standing at the gate when he arrived for his first day. Some of them had known him, and one or two had played football against him, while he was a pupil at the Superior Public School, and they still looked upon him as one of themselves.

"Good morning, Tom," they said, in friendly greeting.

"Mr. Blamey from you," Blamey snapped, and strode on, leaving them in no doubt of the relationship between a master, however youthful, and a parcel of schoolboys.

Blamey's knack of doing well at games made him popular with the older boys at the school, as well as with the junior classes he taught. And it was at this point that his military career really began, though nobody could have guessed then that Blamey, the pupil-teacher, was one day to be Blamey, Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Military Forces.

4

The New Town school had, like all New South Wales public schools of the day, a cadet corps. Membership of this corps was compulsory for older boys. At this time the New Town corps was about fifty strong, and parades were held in the school grounds from two to three o'clock every Wednesday afternoon. The cadets marched, formed fours, sprang to attention, and practised other recognised exercises of military drill under the orders of Staff-Sergeant Tubman, who had blocked Tom's bid to serve his country in South Africa. Now Tom came into his own. He appointed himself Tubman's assistant.

At regular intervals the cadet corps from the two Wagga Wagga schools would march to the rifle butts on Willans Hill for musketry drill. On these days Tubman would go into the target pits to mark for the shooters, while a master from each school would marshal the cadets at the mounds, instruct them in the rudiments of marksmanship, and endeavour to see that none of the incipient sharpshooters shot himself or anybody else. Blamey did this service for the New Town corps. He was a good shot, and he succeeded in infecting at least some of his charges with a little of his own fondness for the rifle. The enthusiasm of a few of his cadets survived even the bruised shoulders they suffered from the mule-like kick of the old Martini-Henry; but Blamey's task grew easier when the Martini-Henry was replaced by the Lee-Enfield.

Then a crisis occurred in the affairs of the school cadet corps. Tubman fell ill. Blamey stepped in and took command of the corps. At once the weekly parades were invested with a dynamic quality they had never had before. Tubman was a competent instructor, but on the gentle side. Blamey was also competent, though nobody knew how he had contrived to master the ritual; and he had a word of command that made Tubman's sound like the cooing of a dove.

"I can see his jaws now, snapping out orders like a dog snapping over a bone," one of his sometime cadets, S. J. Pratt, said fifty years later.

Blamey's cadets, though he drilled them as they had never been drilled before, responded ungrudgingly. They probably sensed, however dimly, the commander under the neat dark suit and the straw boater. In later years they were to boast that they were "Tom Blamey's first recruits."

But there were always two distinct sides to Blamey's nature. One was that of the man of action—the horse-breaker, the fighter, the footballer, the soldier. The other was that of the man of intellect—the reader, the student, the art connoisseur, the music-lover. In deep or shallow intellectual water Blamey was never either out of his depth or stranded.

One of the most important intellectual influences of his early life entered it in the person of Louis Stone. Stone, an Englishman, was thirteen years Blamey's senior. He arrived in Australia with his parents in the year Blamey was born, and a few years later joined the New South Wales Education Department. He came to teach at New Town while Blamey was there. A friendship evolved between the two, and Stone moved into the Blamey home as a lodger. He was a violinist of no mean accomplishments; he also had a cultivated taste in literature, though it was not until 1911 that his first novel,

Jonah, the story of a Sydney larrikin, was to win him a measure of fame.

Stone opened new horizons to young Blamey, who had not yet discovered his star. However, he liked school-teaching, and at the end of 1902 he sat for an examination to select twenty-five pupil-teachers for advanced training in Sydney. Blamey's marks gave him twenty-seventh place. He felt his world had crumbled about his ears. But he had a living to earn. Lacking the qualifications advanced training would have given him, he could not expect to make much progress in New South Wales. He would simply have to struggle on as a teaching hack in small country schools. When he was assigned to a tiny school at Rosewood, near Tumbarumba, sixty miles from Wagga Wagga, he bowed to the inevitable and accepted the post. There was little else he could do, at least until he found time to re-chart his course. After all, Australia was wide. Blamey was determined to make his mark somewhere, if he had to go to the other end of the continent to do it. That was precisely what he did.

A letter reached him from the Education Department one day, telling him that two of the twenty-five pupil-teachers who had won places in the advanced course had retired, so a place was now open to him. Blamey wrote declining the offer, and explaining that he was preparing to leave for Western Australia. A second cousin, Henry Walburn Wheeler, a former New South Wales teacher, who had moved to Western Australia and risen to be head master of the Fremantle Boys' School, had promised to cast round on Tom's behalf. Now Wheeler had written. A teacher's post awaited Tom in Western Australia.

Tom did not hesitate. The future did not look so barren, after all.

3

YOUNG MAN GOES WEST

1

TOM BLAMEY entered a new world when he carried his modest bags ashore at Fremantle in July, 1903.

Western Australia belonged to the same continent as New South Wales. It was also, though many influential Western Australians had fought the Federal idea, a member of the Federation in which the six Australian States had been united on January 1, 1901. But the spirit and outlook were different from anything Blamey had known. The discovery of gold in the 1880s had made Western Australia prosperous as never before, but the State had not yet settled, like New South Wales and the other States of Australia, to an even gait. The imagination of men in every part of Australia had been captured by the prospect of quick riches. They had begged, borrowed, stolen, or otherwise raised money for the steamer passage to Fremantle, and flooded into Western Australia determined to try their luck on the goldfields. No matter how deeply the solid land-owning class resented the influx of these get-rich-quick "t'other-siders" from east of the great Nullarbor Plain, they had to bear it. Or, at least, they had to bear it until the gold fever burned itself out.

Young Blamey did not go to Western Australia seeking gold. It was well for him that he did not, for the expansive days when a handful of barnstorming miners, or even one resolute man working unaided, could dig wealth from Western Australia's soil (or, often enough, dig their own graves, in the quest) were passing, if they had not already passed. The easily won surface gold had nearly all been taken: deep-level mining, which required costly plant, and therefore big capital, was now the order of the day.

Gold, which had helped to enrich Western Australia, had also left scars on the State. In the scurrying excitement of the 1890s, when gold dominated the thoughts of nine-tenths of Western Australia's people, some measures which should have been taken for the better governing of the State had been overlooked, left undone, or postponed. Public education was one of these cinderellas.

Western Australia had not established a teachers' training college until 1901. This meant the standard of locally bred teachers was lower than it should have been. It also meant that Western Australia was obliged to recruit teachers in other States—a factor in the coming to Western Australia of Henry Walburn Wheeler and, at Wheeler's instigation, of Tom Blamey.

Wheeler met the young man from Wagga Wagga on the pier and took him home for lunch. Henry and Mary Wheeler found him reserved, though alert, readier to listen than to talk, but eloquent enough in expressing an opinion when he had formed his judgment. Wheeler did not regret having recommended Blamey for an appointment. To him, the young man appeared to be of the stuff of which good teachers are made.

Blamey was posted to Fremantle Boys' School as an assistant teacher. He took his first class on July 13, 1903. He soon made his presence felt. Some of his pupils over-topped Blamey in height, but he had no difficulty in establishing his authority over them. One class was particularly unruly. It was composed of boys who had drifted into indiscipline through the weakness of a previous master. The nineteen-year-old Blamey recognised the challenge. He asked if he might take charge of the class. Within a few days he had the hard-case class under perfect control. They became known as "Blamey's Lambs." Another master named Nolan, puzzled that such authority should reside in a youth of Blamey's short stature, asked him how he had contrived to work so miraculous a change.

"Fortunately," said Blamey, with his reserved smile, "I was blessed with a good voice and a ready tongue."

Both qualities were to serve him well in the military career which, though he did not know it then, lay ahead of him.

Blamey had not been long in Western Australia before he was being mentioned in education circles as a promising young man. He passed a teachers' examination in 1903 in such style that the Director of Education wrote a special commendation of his paper for the departmental magazine. He also plunged with enthusiasm into the cadet movement, in which he had first made his mark at Wagga Wagga. One achievement in which he took pride was his success in training a musketry team of five cadets, boys aged twelve and thirteen.

He coached them for the Western Australian Cup, a rifle shooting competition open to cadet teams from any part of the State. Blamey's team was two points down when the last boy—"only big enough to carry his rifle," as Blamey wrote at the time—went to the mound. The boy's eye was true and the team won the cup by a point.

If Tom Blamey began to surmise about this time that he had an

uncommon talent for moulding the young and impressionable, then there was good reason for it.

2

Blamey taught at the Fremantle Boys' School throughout the three years and four months he spent in Western Australia. He lodged in Claremont, about midway between Fremantle and Perth.

Some time after he reached Western Australia he arranged for another New South Wales pupil-teacher, Charlie Middleton, to join him there. Though they were opposites in many respects, their friendship had a kind of David and Jonathan quality. The friends they had in common dubbed them "the Siamese Twins." When Blamey left Western Australia for Victoria in 1906 to take up his Army commission, Middleton was inconsolable. He was killed later in a gun-shooting accident, and the news of his death was a heavy blow to Blamey.

Both the young teachers were constant visitors at the Carey home, in Clarement, almost always on Sundays, and often for Saturday afternoon tennis parties. The elder Careys and their five daughters and two sons not only felt a certain sympathy for two young men so far from home, but also enjoyed their company. Tom and Charlie were always ready to lend a hand in chopping and stacking firewood, and doing any other male chores of the household. Blamey and Carey, senior, were particularly thick. Carey was a journalist whose articles appeared regularly in the *West Australian*. He and Blamey would sit together by the hour, arguing questions of public and international concern. The disparity in their ages did not bother them.

The Careys first met Blamey at the Claremont Methodist Church. It was a happy meeting for Blamey. It opened to him the door of a home in which he spent many pleasant hours, and a friendship with the younger Careys which was to survive throughout his lifetime. The older of the Carey boys, Theo, was about the same age as Blamey, and they became close companions. One of their favourite recreations was sailing on the Swan River in young Carey's boat. Theo understood the craft of sailing, but Tom was always a clumsy hand with sails or tiller, though he revelled in the river outings. While Theo supplied the seamanship, Tom would enthrone himself in the stern-sheets and sing, in no very tuneful voice, a variety of popular songs of the period, including one appropriate number, *I Ain't No Sailor Bold*. He would entertain Theo and himself on these expeditions by reciting from memory long passages from the book he chanced to be reading at the time.

Blamey, like many men who succeed in the higher flights of

soldiering, was endowed with a memory of extraordinary retentiveness. It was, with him, less a cultivated faculty than a gift of nature. Theo Carey many times heard him recite, while their boat bucketed through the Swan wavelets, whole pages from the works of such writers as Ruskin, without faltering or missing a word.

All the Careys were fond of the outdoors, and every Easter in those days they would go camping at Blackwall Reach, between Perth and Fremantle. The area is thickly settled now, but in the early years of the century there was no house within miles, nothing to mar the still beauty of the bush. There would usually be a party of twenty or more older men and women and young men and girls under canvas there in the Carey Easter camps. Tom Blamey and Charlie Middleton were, of course, included. It was primitive enough, but joyous, with swimming and boating to be had at the cost of no more effort than a walk of a few yards to the water's edge.

There was little in the way of ready-made entertainment in those days. If you could afford the price of a ticket, you could occasionally see Julius Knight's stage company, Harry Rickards' variety troupe, or some other theatrical combination, over from the eastern States, at Perth's Theatre Royal. But Tom Blamey, Charlie Middleton, and the Carey brothers and sisters had little money to spare. They had to find less expensive amusements. These they found largely in the Claremont Methodist Church. Blamey was a tireless worker for the church. He not only preached a sermon there once in a while, but also threw himself into the organising of concerts in the church hall, in which the now vanished art of the shadow show, as well as singing, elocution, and young lady pianists rendering *The Rustle of Spring*, played its part. Some of his friends felt he devoted his time to such unpaid labours less from a sense of high duty to the church than from an insatiable instinct for organising his fellow creatures. Whatever the reason, this talent was undoubted: when Blamey was stage manager the concerts always went off without the curtain sticking half-way up.

It would be easy to form a distorted picture of the Tom Blamey of those days as a young man steeped in piety and good works. He was nothing of the sort. He was certainly a teetotaller and a non-smoker. But since he had been raised in a Methodist home, his failure to acquire a taste for tobacco and beer in young manhood was scarcely a mark of abnormality. There was also another reason for his observance of such mild austerities. His school-teacher's pay, £130 a year for the first eighteen months, and £140 for the rest of his service in Western Australia, did not run to more than the necessaries of everyday life, and leave a few shillings each week to be sent to his mother.

A photograph of that time shows him to have been a stocky dark youth, with strong arched brows, intense eyes, and straight-cut mouth. He had not yet begun to cultivate the clipped, bristling moustache of his later life. Determination was stamped upon him. He expressed it in every action, whether in work or play. While a member of the Claremont lacrosse team he was badly gashed above the right eye in a semi-final match. It was ten minutes to the final bell, and Fremantle, Claremont's opponents, held a lead of three goals. The injury seemed to galvanise Blamey. With blood streaming down his face he broke time and again through Fremantle's defences, and it was largely through his efforts that Claremont scored the four goals required to win.

His manner and appearance then were those of a young man who knew exactly where he was going. But, in fact, he did not know this until May, 1906. That year was to be the turning-point of his life.

3

In May, 1906, Blamey read a newspaper advertisement which announced that an examination was about to be held to select young men for commissions on the Cadet Instructional Staff of the Australian Military Forces. He had little time to prepare for the examination. It was to be held in five weeks, and a mountain of study loomed before him if he were to have a chance of gaining good marks. He enquired in Perth for the textbooks he needed. Most of these were not to be had, so he wired to Sydney asking that the books should be sent to him by the earliest ship. They arrived a fortnight later. Blamey carried them off to his lodgings and plunged into an orgy of study.

Gone now was an ambition, or perhaps a strong inclination, which he had conceived a year earlier, to forsake teaching and qualify himself for the Methodist Ministry. On June 19, 1905, he expressed himself thus in a letter to his brother, Jim:

"I would like above all things to take out my degree (University) within the next three or four years, and then I would give everything to go right inland to the mines as a home missionary, and after that I would be a minister whose power would be felt, and whose sagacity and sympathy would be Christlike. Such is my ambition. There is no money in it, but there are greater rewards. I don't suppose I shall ever reach that goal, as I must live in the cursed race for gold. Still, *God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform . . .*"

His need to express his philosophy to a more mature audience than a class of schoolboys was displayed in the preaching he was doing in

one or another of the Methodist churches in the Fremantle area. He often mentioned these occasions in letters home. In a letter, early in 1906, to his mother he spoke of his having taken the services at North Fremantle in the morning and at East Fremantle on the same evening.

He was not alone in believing he had a vocation for the Ministry. Leaders of the Methodist Church in Western Australia were pressing him to adopt the Ministry as a career. They proposed that he should serve his apprenticeship to the cloth in Carnarvon, on the coast some five hundred miles north of Perth, and in the lonely pastoral country surrounding the settlement. The prospect attracted Blamey. "There is something in it," he wrote in a letter home, "that appeals to the strength of a man to go out to life at its bedrock."

"They are waiting for me to decide," he wrote to his mother on February 6, 1906, "and I believe that I will go. The free open air life would do me a world of good, and the financial aspect is remarkably solid for a beginner, £200 guaranteed and all extras, in the way of fees and collections. Moreover, it came to me absolutely unsought, and the need of the place is so great. Fancy a town of 300 in the hinterland of a great continent, and the only services those conducted by a High Churchman of the Anglican faith. There is a district with a radius of 280 miles, and it is all sheep country, too, the very life with which I am familiar, and the very type of men with whom I have frequently and fully associated. The matter of a horse and trap, too, has been arranged, and they await my decision . . . Before finally deciding I want your counsel and advice and permission."

The Army's advertisement put an end to his thoughts of entering the Church. Having chosen his course, he flung himself into the work that had to be done. He told his brother Jim later that he did not go to bed, or even take his boots off, in the three weeks remaining to him before the examination. There was at least an element of truth in the claim. More than once he was wakened by the light of dawn to find he had fallen asleep over a book with his head on the table.

He sat for the examination on June 6 and 7, 1906. Blamey, never a man either to overvalue or undervalue his own achievements, believed he had acquitted himself well. But he chafed under the long wait while papers from candidates in every State capital city were collected and judged. He betrayed his eagerness for news of the result in a letter, dated July 9, to his father. He wrote:

"I have not heard how I got on at the military exam., although all the other candidates from W.A. have heard they have failed in practical work, but I know that I scored 75 per cent. in practical work."

It was a trying wait for Blamey until the results were published late in July. He had scored 871 marks, and was placed third among candidates from all Australia. He was headed only by a Queenslander, with 962 marks, and a South Australian with 931.

Yet even now the way ahead was not clear. He wrote to his parents: "I believe there is a vacancy in Queensland, one in South Australia, one in Tasmania, and one in Victoria, but one never knows quite in a distant place like Western Australia."

So it turned out. Each of the four vacancies in other States was awarded to a candidate from one of those States. Blamey's response when he heard the news was neither sorrowful nor hurt: he was furious. He had worked like a beaver for the examination, and he had won third place. He was not disposed to accept a bland notification that he was to have no commission, when two men who had finished below him on the examination lists were even then being measured for their lieutenant's uniforms. He wrote a courteous, but firm, letter of protest to Army Headquarters, Victoria Barracks, Melbourne. The official reply was unhelpful. It told Blamey there was no vacancy in Western Australia, and that he must curb his military ardour until there was such a vacancy. Blamey wrote another letter to Melbourne. Again it was courteous. But this time Blamey mentioned the legal, as well as the moral, aspects of his claim to an Army appointment.

Among the officers who saw his letters was the Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General of the day, Major Julius Bruche, later to reach the rank of major-general and to be honoured with a knighthood. Bruche, who had qualified as a barrister and solicitor in Victoria before entering the Army, was struck by the lucidity and logic of Blamey's letters. Nearly fifty years later he was able to recall the deep impression they made upon his mind. Other officers were also impressed. If they raised their brows at the not-too-heavily veiled suggestion that Blamey was contemplating legal action unless he were given what he considered to be the rights he had earned, they probably decided, "At least, this fellow is a fighter!"

So Blamey was told he should have his commission, and ordered to report in Melbourne in November.

The difficulty that Blamey had to win the fight made the taste of victory all the sweeter. A hint of his pleasure bubbled up through the words of a letter to his father on October 24:

"A week or two at the most will elapse before I bid this place a tearful farewell . . . It makes me laugh now to think of how I used when a youngster to watch the gaudy Staff Officers inspecting the local infantry, with a great depth of awe. I hope that you understand

my position clearly. It is not that of a drill instructor. I will have a large staff of drill instructors (staff-sergeants) under my authority. . . . My work will carry me all over Victoria. The Defence Department will supply me with an all-lines ticket. They also pay all travelling expenses."

The officer who received him when he reported at the old naval drill-hall, Port Melbourne, for a ten-days induction course for new officers was Major Bruche. Bruche eyed the short, thickset, dark young man, standing to attention before him in a uniform of indifferent cut, with the two pips of a first lieutenant on the shoulders. So this was the aggressive youth who had written those threatening letters which had caused such a flutter in Victoria Barracks!

When the routine preliminaries were over Bruche asked:

"Who wrote those letters for you? A lawyer?"

"No, sir," Lieutenant Blamey replied. "I did."

Bruche doubted it. The phrasing of the letters had seemed to bear the stamp of a trained mature mind, rather than of the mind of this twenty-two-year-old stripling. As the years went on and he grew to know Blamey, or rather Blamey's mental capacity, Bruche's doubts vanished. The workmanship of the letters, and the resolute spirit they expressed, were in perfect character with the man.

4

APPRENTICE-AT-ARMS

1

WHEN Blamey reported in Melbourne to take up his commission, the Australian Army was still in swaddling clothes. Until March, 1901, each State had maintained its own military force; and each State had its own ideas on equipment, training, and uniforms. The armed forces of the six States were nearly as varied in methods and appearance as the armed forces of as many Chinese war-lords. A contingent of Victorian soldiers was sent to England to represent the military might of the State at the celebration of Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897. While taking the air at Chelsea Barracks, London, soon after their arrival, they observed a group of soldiers garbed in uniforms they had never seen before.

"Who are those fellows over there?" they asked a British officer.

He stared at the questioners in unbelief, then snapped: "Those fellows are South Australians!"

Major-General Sir Edward Hutton, a British officer, had been chiefly instrumental in bringing order out of this chaos. When the Commonwealth Government took control in 1901 of the national defence forces, it borrowed Hutton's services and gave him the task of laying the foundation of an Australian Army. He spent three years on this work, and the organisation Blamey entered in November, 1906, was the expression of Hutton's efforts to weld the forces of six States into one.

Not that anybody, except a few long-sighted statesmen and soldiers and one or two instinctive seers like Henry Lawson, was persuaded at that time that Australia was ever likely to require the protection of its own Army. Oceans more formidable than any man-made ramparts guarded the island continent against invasion. Louis Blériot was not to fly the English Channel until 1909, and the warplane was a futuristic concept. Australians could attend to their own affairs without troubling their heads about any threat from land-hungry nations beyond the seas. It is improbable that Blamey subscribed to this comfortable theory, for he was a realist, a man of imagination,

and a deep student of history. He was hardly likely to have been blind to the forces that were moving, even as far back as the closing months of 1906, just below the apparently tranquil surface of world affairs.

Anyway, he was intent from the first on making his mark in the Army. His appointment was to the Administrative and Instructional Staff, as Staff Officer (Cadets). Blamey and his immediate superior, a captain, had the task of administering school cadets throughout Victoria. Every school, whether public or private, with enough eligible boys on its roll, had a cadet corps. These corps were drilled by school-teachers who, in their turn, were instructed at Victoria Barracks by such officers as Blamey. It was also the duty of staff officers concerned to move about Victoria inspecting cadet corps, seeing they were adequately equipped, and generally playing the part of military parent.

Blamey's letters to his family at this time crackled with gossip about his work. In the Army he had undoubtedly found his natural career—though not, of course, as a perpetual officer of cadets, which he looked upon merely as a ladder to carry him to bigger things. His letters were read and re-read, and chuckled over, round the fire in the Blamey home. His family had always feared Tom would cause difficulties for himself by his lack of diplomacy. In fact, to the end of his life he was conspicuously deficient in powers of diplomacy. But he did show glimmerings of a diplomatic sense in his early Army days. A certain senior officer at Victoria Barracks was notoriously irascible. One after another his juniors were cut down by the scythe of his displeasure. When Blamey was sent to replace the latest victim he decided he would not survive for long; but he determined to try a little diplomacy. He presented himself, clicked his heels, and made a short speech, in which he said he had been long awaiting the opportunity to work under the officer on the other side of the desk. The irascible one nodded approval, and his face broke into a warm smile. Thereafter Blamey had no firmer friend in the Army. It was one of Blamey's few essays in humbug. Patience with humbug, whether practised by himself or someone else, was not in him. He might have dodged some of the thorny passages of his life had he cultivated, as many a greater sinner has done with profit, the guile of the Pharisee.

However, his early days in the Army were fairly plain sailing, with the exception of the clashes of personality which are inevitable in any big, human organisation. When he was Staff Officer (Cadets) one of his immediate superiors, a captain, was a thin, tall, pedantic man, of fussy habits. He worked entirely by the book, and at least

once a month he would parade himself to Bruche, then Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General, and announce, "I wish to report I have put Mr. Blamey under arrest, sir."

The first time it happened Bruche supposed Blamey had committed a serious infraction of the military code, but he quickly discovered it was some offence as trivial as not having put the blotting-paper straight on the desk. Thereafter the formula was invariable. The captain would report, Blamey would be summoned, and Bruche, trying to counterfeit severity, would intone, "Let this be a lesson to you, Mr Blamey. I release you from arrest immediately."

But there was no really black mark on Blamey's record. Though not popular, he was respected by his brother officers. They seemed to sense in him a limitless ambition, a relentless determination to get ahead. When he spoke the words came slowly, deliberately, as if he were weighing each one—as, indeed, he was. He was "Blamey," not "Tom," to most other officers of the same rank as himself. He had a knack of surprising them, as at an exercise when he swung himself on to the back of a horse and sat the animal as if he had been born in the saddle. It was a natural enough accomplishment, since he had ridden horses from early childhood. But he had never bothered to mention his equestrian skill to men working alongside him.

He worked long hours, whether in the barracks or travelling about Victoria on his cadet inspections. There was little time for recreation, yet Blamey managed to steal a few hours of private life for himself. It was in these hours that he courted the young woman who was to become his wife in the spring of 1909.

2

Her name was Minnie Millard. She had dark, curling hair, a retroussée nose, dark brown eyes, and an animated nature. She was nine years older than Blamey but he was mature beyond his years, and the difference in their ages was no barrier to his admiration. Minnie and her five brothers and two sisters, with their widowed mother, were active members of the Methodist Church which stands on the corner of Williams-road and Toorak-road, Toorak.

The Millards, except those of the older children who were married, lived in "Hylands," a gracious old two-storey stone house on Toorak-road, long since replaced by a cinema. Mrs Millard was the widow of an Edwin Millard, who had been a prosperous sharebroker and at one time president of the Melbourne Stock Exchange. It was at the church that the Millards met Tom Blamey, who was lodging in Bruce-street, Toorak. The Rev. Harold Overend, the minister at that

time, introduced him to the congregation at an after-service meeting one Sunday night as "a soldier of the King and a soldier of the Heavenly King."

He was attracted by Minnie almost at once; and she responded to the charm of the dark, intense young man, with his clipped black moustache and pleasant, accentless speaking voice, which was curiously urbane for one whose life until then had been largely lived in at least the fringes of the bush. Minnie's own voice had much to do with the appeal she exerted upon Blamey. He told one of his friends later that at the start he "fell in love with her voice."

Minnie Millard's background was very different from Tom Blamey's. She had been born in Ballarat to parents who, though not wealthy, were in comfortable circumstances; he came of hard-working parents who had had to consider every shilling twice before spending it. He was educated at a State school; she was educated at Ballarat College, then at Mrs Adderley's prim and exclusive South Yarra academy for the daughters of the well-to-do. Minnie was accomplished in all the refinements practised by young ladies of the day. She was a competent musician, and at times acted as organist of the church. Blamey had a deep appreciation of, but singularly little talent for, music. He sometimes attempted to sing to Minnie's accompaniment. The result of these efforts must have tested her affection to the full.

At first the Millards invited Blamey to share an occasional midday dinner or evening supper after the Sunday church services, in which he sometimes acted as lay preacher. Then, as his friendship with Minnie ripened, the brisk rapping of his knuckles on the glass of the long French windows at the front of the house was heard with increasing frequency.

He was liked by the Millard brothers and sisters, who soon detected an appetite for fun below his exterior reserve. True, the Millard boys spoke of him as "Peanuts"—an irreverent reference to his association with school cadets, the Peanut Brigade. But there was no ill-will in the appellation. And he certainly had a knack of managing the young. When Elsie Millard was on holiday he took over her Sunday school class of senior girls, who found him an amusing and informative teacher. Whenever the Millards picnicked on the Yarra, Blamey usually went along. On one such excursion the clouds rolled up and broke in a Melbourne rainstorm, which transformed the sandwiches to pulp and soaked every member of the picnic party to the skin. Blamey, his hair and moustache dripping, seemed to enjoy the doleful ending, and warbled in his tuneless voice as he helped to pull the hired rowboat back down the river.

Like the Careys, of Western Australia, the Millards learned that, for all the dignity of his uniform, Blamey was an expert at household chores, whether drying dishes or cutting melons for jam-making. He was adept, too, in gripping the slippery melon seeds between thumb and fore-finger and propelling them with deadly accuracy at his wife-to-be and his future sisters-in-law when melon-cutting was in progress in the big breakfast-room of the Millard home.

Unchaperoned courting was not encouraged in those days, and Blamey's most intimate moments with Minnie were those they spent in an S-shaped conversation chair in the Millard drawing-room, whispering their secrets and dipping into a box of chocolates balanced on the curved arm of the chair separating them. But the romance progressed, and on September 8, 1909, they were married.

The ceremony was performed at "Hylands" in the presence of a family party. The Blameys were represented by one of Tom's older brothers, Dick. Minnie wore full bridal dress; Blamey was elegant in white tie and tails. They changed in an upstairs bedroom before leaving for the honeymoon at Beaumaris, then a tranquil seaside hamlet, about fourteen miles from Melbourne. A hansom cab waited at the front door to carry them off, and Minnie's sisters, chattering and giggling, stationed themselves in the front hallway armed with confetti for a farewell bombardment. Mrs Millard, who had been helping Minnie into her going-away frock, came down the stairs.

"Well," she said, "they've gone."

Blamey, planning the thing as if it were a military operation, had hired a second hansom cab to wait at the back gate of the house in Jackson-street, and he and Minnie had changed into their travelling clothes and slipped away down the back stairs. From the Beaumaris Hotel, where they stayed, he wrote his sister-in-law Elsie a letter which robbed the deception of any sting.

"Don't misunderstand," he wrote. "Min just could not bear to say good-bye to you all."

3

So Blamey and Minnie started married life on a lieutenant's pay, then ranging from £250 to £350 a year, according to the officer's period of service. It was enough for their needs, but no juggling could stretch it to include many luxuries. It was to be December 1, 1910, before Blamey was promoted to the rank of captain and the affluence of £375 a year, with a yearly increase of £25 until the salary reached £450.

The Blameys' first home was a modest cottage in Oban-street,

Hawksburn, within comfortable walking distance of Minnie's old home. They both wanted children, and when Minnie became pregnant they were convinced the unborn child would be a son. Blamey said, in chuckling mood, one day that the boy must be named Adolphus, possibly because it was the least acceptable name he could think of on the spur of the moment. The idea amused them, and throughout Minnie's pregnancy they improved their idle moments by discussing the upbringing, education, and subsequent career of Adolphus, a name quickly shortened to Dolf.

The baby, born on June 29, 1910, fulfilled his parents' expectations by being a boy. When he was christened they gave him the names of Charles Middleton, Blamey's old school-teacher friend. But he was never Charles to his father, mother, or other members of the family circle. To them he was Dolf, and Dolf he remained until, twenty-two years later, as a Royal Australian Air Force pilot, he died in the wreckage of a crashed aircraft at Richmond, New South Wales.

The twenty-six-year-old Blamey's chest swelled as he contemplated his attainment of fatherhood. In fact, he was never to be an indulgent father with either of his sons, Dolf, or Tom, who was born four years later. A few of his intimates knew there were areas of softness in his nature, but he rebelled against unbending in front of other eyes. This stiffness became more marked as he grew older, especially after he had undergone the hardening process of war. The shell he laid about himself thickened with the years, and though it protected him against some blows of life, it deprived him of compensating joys.

He hoped after Dolf's birth that his second child would be a daughter. He was always at his easiest with little girls, and the birth of a daughter might well have provided the influence he needed to make him shed the armour he put on. Yet in Dolf's infancy Blamey was every inch the proud young father. He and Minnie could afford no expensive entertainments. Their favourite pastime was strolling the pleasant streets of South Yarra and Toorak, which had not then become bustling suburbs of a bustling metropolis, with Blamey carrying Dolf, or Blamey or Minnie pushing Dolf in his perambulator. They were on the way to visit the Millards one afternoon when the perambulator collapsed, and Dolf was launched from his nest of warm blankets on to the footpath. Blamey snatched up the baby and, with Minnie at his heels, sprinted to the nearest doctor's surgery. However, Dolf had suffered no hurt.

Blamey had a lively spirit of fun in those days. It never deserted him, in fact. He curbed it in later life; but even in the second war, when he was Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Military Forces, with enormous problems on his mind and a position of dignity to

maintain, the old gaiety would bubble up now and then. When it did so he would demand a party in which, with his arm about a subordinate officer's shoulders, he would join, spiritedly if unmelodiously, in a sing-song at the piano. At times he would have a weary brigadier, who had stolen away to bed to get some overdue sleep, routed out with the instruction, "The Old Man wants you to sing a song."

As a young man, he would always take his part in any piece of nonsense—short of horseplay, which he disliked. One Christmas Eve night Elsie Millard and a Queensland cousin, Daisy Morgan, who was visiting the Millards, dressed themselves in the most extravagant clothing they could find and stole round to the Blameys' house. There, with some preliminary giggling, they took their stand in the garden and raised their voices in a repertoire of carols. Presently the house-door opened and Blamey came down the steps leading from the veranda to the garden. With grave face, and no sign of recognition, he walked with measured tread to the two carollers, presented them with a threepenny bit like a Georgian buck handing a guinea to a lackey, then turned on his heel and took his way back into the house.

Even then he was a man who liked his own way, and usually managed to get it. For a few days he was batching while his wife and Dolf were away, and each morning on the way to the barracks he would call at the Millard home to tell Elsie what provisions he required from the tradespeople. He strode in by the back door one morning and found Elsie working at the kitchen sink. Without halting, he barked a series of instructions at her, and was halfway up the hall to the front door when she snapped:

"Come back here!"

She was astonished when he obeyed and stood meekly before her while she dressed him down for his lack of good manners. He did not even bristle when two young nieces, who were visiting their Aunt Elsie, exploded in laughter at the humbling of this lordly young officer.

A new battle for Blamey to win loomed in 1911. About this time Australia had arranged for a place in each two-year course at the Staff College, Quetta, India, to be reserved for an Australian regular officer. The selection was determined by the result of a competitive examination. The first Australian to go to Quetta was Captain E. F. Harrison, in the 1910-11 course. Harrison, later a brigadier, and Commandant from 1929 to 1931 of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, had joined the Australian permanent forces in 1903.

Blamey determined to win a Quetta course for himself. As a Staff College graduate, he could open doors which would stay shut against

a run-of-the-mill officer of the Australian Army. It would mean hard study, of course; but hard study had never frightened him. Poring over his books early in the morning and late at night, he crammed knowledge as he had not crammed since the Western Australian days of preparation for the Army entrance examination. Blamey knew other young officers of good intelligence and attainments also had their sights set on Quetta. He was not going to lose the prize by letting someone else get his nose ahead.

Minnie was worried by the strain of incessant study he laid on himself, by the sight of the hard-looking books he always seemed to be delving into until the small hours of the morning. But the result justified the effort. When the examination lists appeared Captain Blamey's name led all the rest. He wrote to his father, telling of this new success, and remarking, "My lucky star is up."

In December, something more than a month before his twenty-eighth birthday, he arrived in Quetta, with Minnie and Dolf. It was the first time he had left his own country. The prediction of the clairvoyant Miss Kate Russell, made in Wagga Wagga many years before, that he would "cross the seas many times" was beginning to be fulfilled.

4

Minnie Blamey did not share her husband's delight about the uprooting of their Australian home and the move to India. She knew it would be at least two years before she saw Australia again. And she was going into an atmosphere alien to any she had ever known—the world of the army cantonment. Her translation from the life of the sheltered girl she had been before her marriage to that of the "army wife" was complete.

She had never hungered to travel. She was deeply attached to her home, her mother, her brothers, and sisters. Her family, reading between the lines of her letters, sensed that she had not been able to come to terms with Quetta. She described the people she met, the parties, Dolf's pleasure in his Shetland pony, Tom's absorption in his work. But the Millards knew she was missing the faces of home.

But Blamey revelled in Quetta from the hour of his arrival. It represented not only a higher rung on the military ladder, but a broader, freer way of life than any he had known. In his home, drinking, except on occasions of the most special significance, had been considered undesirable. His mother, as president of the Wesley Church temperance guild, had persuaded many a too-thirsty Wagga Waggan to sign the pledge—and keep it. At Quetta Tom found the

bottle had a regular place in the daily round. A drink quickened your tongue, raised your spirits. He discovered that when he took a drink, or two or three or more, as he now did in company without thinking twice about it, the effect on him was more beneficent than harmful. Quetta gave him something else, too. Blamey had always been interested in people, and here he was continually rubbing shoulders with a large variety of men and women, most of whom had qualities that made them worth studying as human beings.

Of course, it was hard work. These British Army wallahs drove you as if you were a mule. But this was something Blamey did not mind. His thirst for knowledge was insatiable. It was to remain so throughout his life.

And the power of his personality made him a figure to be remembered by most of the men he met, whether they were British officers studying alongside him or Indians he encountered in his quest for deeper understanding of this, to him, strange new world. In January, 1943, nearly three decades after Blamey had left India, an Australian, Flying Officer (later Flight Lieutenant) C. Harding Browne, who was serving in the Royal Air Force, was travelling in a civilian bus from Chakatra, in the Lesser Himalayas, to Shahjehanpur, a city about seventy miles distant, in the central United Provinces. Browne was seated next to a Mahommedan of about sixty, whose age-bleached hair and beard were dyed red. The bearing of the Mahommedan, who wore a white European-style coat and trousers, was reserved; but as the journey progressed he and Browne drifted into conversation. Browne, to illustrate some point he was making in their discussion, mentioned certain marital practices of the Australian aborigines. The Indian's interest quickened at once.

"Do you know Australia?" he asked.

Browne replied that he had been born, and had lived most of his life, in Australia. In fact, he was a veteran of the A.I.F. in the 1914-18 war.

"Ah," said the Indian, "I know your Number One soldier, General Blamey." He told Browne that, in the years immediately before the first war, he had been in business in the bazaar at Quetta. "I did much business in those days with the young Australian, Captain Blamey," he said. "He bought many things from me and was always coming to me for information. He bought several oriental rugs, and he learned much about rugs in those days. He had good judgment. Ah, he was a very pleasant man to do business with, the young Captain Blamey!"

Not that Blamey was tempted by the lure of India to abandon his military studies in favour of the pursuit of orientalism. The Army was

War leader Blamey

Police Chief Blamey

his first love, and at Quetta he was plunging ever deeper into the realm of knowledge that concerned him most nearly: the science of soldiering. He had always known there was more to it than ability to click one's heels, calibrate a gun, and go charging into battle at the head of one's men. But it was Quetta that made him really aware of the possibilities of the territory he had penetrated when he put on military uniform.

Blamey graduated from Quetta in December, 1913. His success meant that he might now carry after his name the letters *psc*, in token of the fact that he had passed the Staff College course. To a soldier, that group of symbols stood for an important milestone on the military road.

As part of his Quetta course, Blamey had served a few weeks in 1912 and 1913 with each of a number of regiments of the British Army stationed in India. Now he began a series of post-graduate attachments, including a period on the General Staff of Army Headquarters, at Simla. In January, 1914, he had a few weeks with the King's Royal Rifle Corps at Rawalpindi, and from here he wrote a letter home full of optimism and shrewd observation. "The period abroad has taught me many things. The chief one is that life is not to be taken too seriously, or too heavily. Keep on smiling is about the best thing going. The millions of India taught me the unimportance of individuals, and hence of myself." Then a few lines about his Staff College results: "Did I tell you that I was well reported on at Quetta? The General, when I went to say good-bye, walked me up and down holding my arm in a most affectionate way, and saying how glad he was that my report would be so good."

The Australian Army had arranged that from India Blamey should go to the United Kingdom. There he was to be posted for experience to British formations and units. He and Minnie decided that she and Dolf should return to Australia and await him there. For the world was somewhat unsettled and nobody could foretell what would happen: even war was possible. And Minnie was expecting a second child later in the year. So, early in 1914 the Blameys said farewell, she to take ship for Australia, he to finish his tour of duty in India. Neither guessed then what a long farewell they were saying. It was to be the better part of six years before they met again. When they did Dolf would have grown into a lively nine-year-old. The then unborn Tom (whose birth was to take place on August 9, 1914, though his father always stubbornly insisted the natal day was August 8, the date on which the 1918 Hindenburg Line attack opened) would be a shy child of five, uncertain whether to address the strange man home from the wars as "Tom," or "Daddy." Blamey himself

would be a brigadier-general, with a chestful of ribbons, including those of the C.B., C.M.G., and D.S.O., and a name as a soldier known throughout Australia and in many places beyond its shores.

But these things were hidden from the eyes of Tom and Minnie Blamey when they parted. He told his mother in a letter in which he mentioned his forthcoming journey to England that he was "looking forward to it very much." He went on; "India is a great place to be in under military auspices, much less interesting to visit as a civilian, good for a short tour. It is full of marvels, and wonders, and beauty unknown in any other part of the world."

He left India about the middle of May, but did not reach London until the last days of June. He had done a little not altogether aimless wandering *en route* on the continent of Europe, with emphasis especially on the classic battlefields. He had also tried to gain a closer acquaintanceship with German military methods. He had succeeded so well in this design that at Metz, the ancient fortress city of Alsace-Lorraine, he had been arrested, questioned, had his papers examined, and after some hours' detention been advised to take the next train out of Germany.

Had the German authorities known what a painful thorn Blamey was to be in the Fatherland's flesh in the war which was to begin less than three months later, they might have found a pretext to hold him until the last pre-war train from Germany had left.

5

THE ROAD TO AMIENS

1

BLAMEY's feelings were mixed when the Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated at Sarajevo on June 23, 1914. He was sufficiently versed in foreign affairs to know when Austria presented its ultimatum to Serbia a month later that this meant war—and not, as the ignorant and incurably optimistic believed, a little comic-opera war in the Balkans, but a war whose impact would shake the foundations of mankind. It was no time for an ambitious young Australian officer to be ten thousand miles away from his own country.

When war was declared he was serving with the headquarters of the Wessex (Territorial) Division on Salisbury Plain. Two possibilities lay before him. He might be appointed to the British Army in France; or he might be claimed by Australia, for service with the Australian armed forces, either at home or overseas. Sentiment made him hanker to fight with the Australians; self-interest told him he would find bigger opportunities with the British Army. He wrote to his brother Jim a little later that, if he had been allowed to go with the British forces, he would have got a much better post than the one he was assigned to by Australia. For, in the end, the tug-of-war between sentiment and self-interest was resolved for him.

The war was six days old when he was transferred from the Wessex Division to duty at the War Office—"pinched for work in the Intelligence Branch," to quote his own words in a letter. He worked from eight in the morning till ten at night six days a week, and usually on Sundays, too. Once a week he was on duty all night. He took his turn in preparing a daily Intelligence summary which was sent to the King and Lord Kitchener at 9.30 each night. He found it interesting to be behind the scenes, but dull to see the daylight hardly at all. He did not have to suffer the deprivation for long. When the Australian Government decided to raise the Australian Imperial Force for service abroad, they chose the Scottish-born Inspector-General of the Australian Army, Brigadier-General (later Major-General

Sir) William Bridges, to command the 1st Division. Bridges named Blamey, now a major, as his G.S.O. III (Intelligence).

The first contingent of the A.I.F. sailed from Australia on November 1, 1914, and Blamey was ordered to join the division in Egypt. So the young man who, as a raw country boy of fifteen, had tried to become a soldier, but had wilted under the eye of Staff-Sergeant Tubman, was headed for the wars at last.

He finished duty at the War Office on the last day of November. He was to see the war-dimmed lights of London again within less than two years, when a substantial part of the A.I.F. was transferred from the Mediterranean to the Western Front. But Blamey had no means of knowing this at the time.

He was glad now that he had seized the chance, soon after his arrival in England, of making the trip to Newquay, Cornwall, which his father had left more than fifty years before. There he had visited his Aunt Bessie Cardell, Richard Blamey's sister, and met an array of ageing Cornish folk who remembered his father as a boy. He had also explored the Newquay beach, which, he told his father in a letter, "is a perfect beach and knocks Cronulla sideways." But sentimental pilgrimages of this kind were behind him now for the duration of the war. He steamed away from England in the P. and O. liner R.M.S. *Mooltan*, bound for Egypt. Off Algiers he wrote to his brother Jim:

"You will see that I have one of the three General Staff jobs. I am rather pleased about it. . . . My staff job is by no means the most dangerous in the force, but in a show of this sort one never quite knows how the luck will fall."

The words were true enough. Within five months, after the 1st Australian Division landed at Gallipoli, Blamey was to taste enough danger to satisfy any normal man's appetite.

2

The A.I.F. was already established in a desert camp at Mena, outside Cairo, when Blamey arrived and reported to Bridges on December 10.

He was still not thirty-one but his subordinates on divisional headquarters sensed at once the ironclad efficiency of this dark, generally unsmiling officer, who drove himself hard, and expected everybody under his direct orders to spring into action at the crack of his voice. Some of them found him unapproachable, and he was not generally popular; but he was respected, because his efficiency was more, much more, than that of the competent robot.

Blamey had always been something of a lone wolf. There was a steady development in this expression of his nature throughout the first war, beginning with the months at Mena. His absorption in the exacting work of every day was one reason for it; but even in the mess, among his brother officers, he was reserved. When he went into Cairo for a night's relaxation, he often chose to go alone, or perhaps with one of the two or three officers with whom he was on nightclub terms. But for most of his time Blamey was at his desk, with the exception of the daily period he spent with one fighting unit or another. Colonel (later Lieut.-General Sir) Brudenell White, G.S.O. I of the 1st Division, held that staff officers should not be remote untouchables living in ivory towers. White visited a line unit whenever he could snatch an hour or two away from his office, and he expected his juniors to copy his example.

White, who was killed in an air crash on August 13, 1940, while Chief of the General Staff, is considered by many impartial judges to have been as fine a staff officer as any Australia has produced. He was eight years older than Blamey and, militarily, all the things Blamey wished to be. Inevitably Blamey modelled himself upon White. This is not to say that Blamey was merely an echo, a carbon copy, as it were, of White. He was too much of an individualist ever to be Sancho Panza to some other man's Don Quixote.

In the months at Mena he demonstrated to himself, and to his superiors, that he possessed many of the qualities indispensable to success as a staff officer. But the ultimate test was yet to come. Blamey, like all the officers and men of the division, with the exception of a few who had seen service in the South African War, had still to prove himself under fire. His chance to do so came on April 25, 1915, when the Anzacs landed on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

On April 21 he wrote to his mother: "It may be a long time before I have another opportunity of writing to you. . . . We are tucked away in a snug bay in the Island of Lemnos waiting until all is ready. That moment has almost come and soon young Australia will have tasted battle. . . . The operation we are about to undertake will be a historic one for its great and experimental interest." It was not the letter of a nervous man. However, he was aware of the dangers, for on the same day he wrote to his brother Jim mentioning his will and giving certain personal instructions in the event of his being "pinked".

Blamey, with General Bridges and Colonel White, landed on the beach of Anzac Cove at 7.20 in the morning four days later, a few hours after the assault troops had stormed the Gallipoli heights.

On the Peninsula, throughout the campaign, but especially in the

early days before the attackers consolidated their positions, the staff officer was in hardly less danger than the frontline soldier. If he were to do his work he had to accept all the risks of the battlefield. Blamey did not shirk these risks, any more than did other officers of divisional headquarters, including Bridges, who was constantly exposing himself to enemy fire, and was fatally wounded by a sniper's bullet before the campaign was a month old.

On the first afternoon Brigadier-General (later Major-General Sir) James McCay's 2nd Infantry Brigade was desperately engaged. Blamey was sent to bring the 4th Battalion to McCay's aid, and he led it up from the neighbourhood of the beach through the confused area of battle, and delivered it at dusk to a ridge thinly held by a handful of Australians. The battalion arrived just in time to prevent the Turks from recapturing the disputed ridge.

Dr. C. E. W. Bean, general editor of Australia's 1914-18 war history, was with Blamey in the Australian trenches in the late phases of a Turkish attack on a feature known as the Pimple in May. They saw two 2nd Battalion men "messing with some bits of wood stuck on to the end of a rifle," as Bean put it in his unpublished diary.

"What on earth have you got there?" Blamey asked.

"An arrangement so you can hit without being hit," one of the men replied.

It was a primitive periscope, and in Bean's view at the time, "probably an impracticable wild brainwave of a man who was rabid keen on keeping out of danger." But Blamey did not agree with this finding.

"It may be something," he said. "It's not a bad object in view, anyway—to hit the enemy."

He arranged for the inventor of the device, Lance-Corporal (later Sergeant) W. C. Beech, to be detached from his battalion so that he might perfect his crude periscope in the beach area, where the enemy was likely to provide fewer distractions. The periscope rifle was tested in the front line within a few days. It was extensively used in sectors where the Australian and enemy trenches were only a short distance apart. The incident was an example of Blamey's readiness to encourage an unorthodox idea, which might have been ignored by a man of less sympathetic imagination.

His letters home touched on his personal exploits only in passing. Writing to his mother from his tiny hillside dugout, with its bed contrived from an empty egg-crate, he sent a pencilled sketch he had drawn of the Gaba Tepe area. His letter said: "The two large olive trees are in the middle of fields which are known as Blamey's Meadows. This is because I had a night out with a couple of Tas-

manian boys. . . . We had a bit of a fight with nine Turks in the dark. We got five, we know (and we hope we bagged eight), and then we got away without a scratch. A real good exciting hour it was."

This was the only story he bothered to send his parents of the events of the night of May 13, when he led a three-man patrol into enemy country in an attempt to fix the position of the Olive Grove batteries —more popularly known as "Beachy Bill." The heavy-calibre shells these guns were able to drop on the beach made movement there difficult and dangerous. The Australians knew the general, but not the precise, position of the guns, and earlier attempts by patrols to pinpoint the site had failed. So now Blamey, with Sergeant J. H. Will (later Lieut. Will, M.M.) and Bombardier A. A. Orchard (later Lieut. Orchard, M.M.), picked his way through the darkness.

They were snaking on their bellies across open ground when they heard a scuffing of boots, and saw in the gloom the figures of a party of Turks. They lay unmoving while the Turks halted within a few yards of them, and the leader exchanged a few words with a sentry in a clump of scrub. Then the Turks moved on. The Australians were separated from each other by about ten paces, Orchard in front, Blamey next, Will at the rear. The Turks headed for the gap between Orchard and Blamey. The leader was almost on top of Orchard before he saw him. He raised his rifle to bayonet Orchard, and Blamey, who had his revolver out, shot him. The next few seconds were a wild mêlée, with the Turks running in all directions, and the short flashes of Blamey's revolver and the long flashes of his companions' rifles lancing the darkness. Then Blamey and his men bolted for the Australian lines. Their stealthy outward journey had taken four hours; they made the return trip in twenty minutes. They had failed to find the Olive Grove guns, but it had been, in Blamey's words, "a good exciting hour."

The patrol fight had a curious sequel a few days later. The Turks sent a colonel and a major to discuss terms of a truce to enable the dead to be buried. The colonel, blindfolded, was conducted into the Australian lines; Blamey and the major, Bimbashi Saib Bey, bore each other company on the beach. They lounged on a bank above the shore, with a field of poppies and wildflowers behind them, and spent the whole of an afternoon gossiping in, as Blamey confessed in a letter, "bad French."

"Of course, you won't get to Constantinople," the Turk said.

"I think we shall," said Blamey.

"Well, at one kilometre a month it will take a long time."

This was a facer, and Blamey let it go.

They talked about rates of pay, the German attempt to capture

Calais, the courage of the Turks, the fighting qualities of the Australians. Then Blamey casually mentioned the patrol incident. The Turk nodded. Yes, he had heard of it. In fact, his own men had been involved.

"Our men reckon they killed about twenty-five of your fellows," Blamey said, deliberately giving an extravagant figure.

"No," the Turk replied. "Only about six."

Blamey nodded. Well, that was something. It more or less confirmed his own idea of the Turks' losses.

"There were about twenty-five of your men," the Turk volunteered.

"Were there?" Blamey said.

And that was pleasing, too. He and his companions had certainly left an impression behind them!

But the Gallipoli campaign held few such highlights, for Blamey or for any other officer or man serving in it. The weeks and months resolved themselves chiefly into a bloody and dogged match for the upper hand.

After three months on the Peninsula Blamey went back to Egypt, as one of a group of battle-tried officers chosen to form the nucleus of the staff of the 2nd Division. He returned as the division's Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General, and was there until the Allied forces were evacuated a few days before Christmas, 1915. Did he, even in those busy days on Gallipoli, have a prevision of the rough road ahead of him far in the future? His brother Jim wrote him a letter from Wagga Wagga, in which he talked of getting into khaki and doing his bit. Blamey replied: "I note what you say about enlisting. I hope you are not successful." When he was leaving Australia for Quetta he had invested £1,000, mainly the proceeds of the sale of his Melbourne home, in a drapery and men's wear store that Jim opened in Wagga Wagga in 1912. He added in his letter to Jim: "I am depending largely on that business to pull my small family along if I strike a bad day." As it turned out, he sold his share to Jim some years after the first war, and before the "bad day" came.

But as the evacuation was planned and put into effect, Blamey had other things than business to occupy his mind. He had learned much on Gallipoli, and he went on learning even until the last hours, when he saw in operation the series of cunning ruses, mostly conceived by Colonel White's nimble brain, which were used to conceal from the enemy the fact that a withdrawal was in progress.

Experience of failure seems to be an indispensable part in the training of any man who becomes a British general. It is almost inevitable that, if he rises high enough, he will some day have to manage the retreat of a beaten army, and transform defeat into a

kind of left-handed victory. It was to be twenty-five years before such a moment came for Blamey at the end of the Battle of Greece, in 1941.

3

Blamey suffered one misfortune in the first war. He was so able a staff officer that he was never given a chance to command a battalion or brigade in the field for any length of time. This is not to say that, as a staff officer, he was infallible. Like every man, he had a brain and body which grew weary at times; and like every weary man he made mistakes. He was temporarily under a cloud at one time when, desperately tired by his exertions as G.S.O. I of the 1st Division, he made a small but injurious error in written orders he issued for an infantry operation. But nobody short of a superman could have done such a task without an occasional slip of brain or hand. Blamey never claimed to be a superman.

He reached France with the 2nd Division in the spring of 1916. In July he became G.S.O. I of the 1st Division, thus stepping into the post Brudenell White, the man he so admired, had held before becoming General (later Field-Marshal Lord) Birdwood's chief of staff to the Anzac Corps six months earlier. It was a mark of the confidence Blamey's work had inspired in slightly more than eighteen months with the A.I.F.

The division's first assignment after Blamey's appointment was in the Somme offensive. The imprint of his mind is clearly discernible on the planning of the division's operations at that time, including the capture of Pozières. He wrote home after that savage action: "Here in a quiet home, with a lovely garden and beautiful flowers, I can just hear the low burst of guns away up beyond Pozières. Pozières is ours, captured alone by our division. We are all very proud of the feat. Our plan, which was chiefly mine, led to a brilliant success. We took the job on after the British had failed in three separate efforts. We carried the covering position, the western flanking position, and the village in great style, not all in one operation, but still we did it. It was the most brilliant exploit since the opening days of this most terrible battle. The hostile bombardment on our poor lads during the battle is said to have been as bad as at Verdun. The noise and smoke and dust were simply awful. Now we are back in rest. It is something to have had the planning of a most brilliant success, but the grief that struck Australia over Gallipoli will be slight compared with the grief that will strike her now. Our men are, in my opinion, the finest fighting men in all the world. Pozières has established them in France, and now they will make good. The division possesses that undefined

quality that the great thinker on war called 'military virtue.' It knows its power. I must liken it to the Stonewall Brigade in the Civil War. God grant me a clear brain to plan and think for it."

All this was well enough, but Blamey wanted a fighting command. Within six months it seemed he was to achieve his desire. He was given command of the 2nd Battalion, then about three weeks later temporary command of the 1st Infantry Brigade. He had little opportunity to show whatever talents he might have possessed as a fighting commander. Long before the spring of 1917 he had been recalled to his old post as G.S.O. I of the 1st Division.

He was disappointed, not because he was a fire-eater who craved battle-smoke and wished to emulate the heroes of *Deeds That Won the Empire*, but because he believed himself to be incomplete, as a soldier, while he lacked regimental and brigade experience in action. But there was no help for it. Blamey's fate was decided at a higher level, and he went back to staff work for the duration of the war. He bowed to the inevitable with a good grace. His great faculty of loyalty extended to the commanders he served, as well as to his personal friends. In this, as in many other principles of his military life, he modelled himself upon his first idol, Brudenell White—"a noble character," as Blamey once described him.

Though Blamey was the junior, his and White's first war careers had much in common. Each was denied command in the field because of his excellence as a staff officer. Many Australians considered White should have been given command of the Australian Corps in 1918, when Monash was promoted to that post. Monash's success was beyond all question, but it is arguable if White would have shone less brilliantly. It is also arguable that Blamey, if given the chance to do so, could have made as big a name in a field command as did many of the A.I.F.'s fighting leaders. It was not to be. Blamey was to remain G.S.O. I of the 1st Division until May, 1918. Of course, he did not know it at the time, but his more or less reluctant dedication of himself to staff work was all part of the pattern which was to fit him for his task as chief of staff to Monash—as vital a wartime post as any that a man of his years could hope to fill.

4

The Germans, revitalised on the Western Front by Russia's withdrawal from the war, were still fighting with tigerish spirit in May, 1918. The war-weary Allied armies could see ahead only another summer of bitter campaigning—more Bullecourts, more Bapaumes, more Passchendaeles. It was at this time that Sir John Monash,

G.O.C. of the 3rd Division, was promoted to command the Australian Corps. Monash, a brilliant Melbourne-born Jewish engineer, was the first Australian ever to exercise a military command of such scope and influence.

Monash chose Blamey as his chief of staff, and Blamey served him in that appointment until the end of the war. It was a high tribute to the quality of the young man who, wearing a major's crowns, had appeared at Mena, in December, 1914, as G.S.O. III of the 1st Division. Monash's satisfaction with Blamey as his chief staff officer, and Blamey's with Monash as his General Officer Commanding, was many times expressed by each man in the years after the battles they planned together had been fought and won.

"Blamey was a man of inexhaustible industry and accepted every task with placid readiness," Monash wrote. "Nothing was ever too much trouble . . . I was able to lean on him in times of trouble, stress, and difficulty, to a degree which was an inexpressible comfort to me."

Blamey said in after years: "In the whole time I was his chief of staff, Monash made only one mistake."

It is not recorded that Blamey—a man, in Monash's words, of "exemplary loyalty"—ever named the mistake that Monash made.

Direction of a corps totalling 166,000 troops was an immense responsibility for Monash. The post of its chief of staff was hardly less so for Blamey, now a brigadier-general at the age of thirty-four. Monash put the thing into perspective when he wrote that his command was "two and a half times the size of the British Army under the Duke of Wellington, or of the French Army under Napoleon Bonaparte, at the Battle of Waterloo."

Men in the front line had no means of knowing it, but the eve of the Australian soldier's greatest victories in France had been reached when Monash and Blamey arrived at Corps Headquarters late in May. Together, they planned the Battle of Hamel, which was fought on July 4, and won in two hours. It could have been a tragic defeat. Blamey deserves much of the credit for the fact that it was not. Monash, under the persuasion of senior officers of the Royal Tank Corps, evolved a plan for an advance by tanks, with infantry in support. The first wave of tanks was to have replaced the orthodox infantry barrage. Obviously, if the tanks failed, as they had failed earlier in a somewhat similar operation with the Australians at Bullecourt, the attack would be smashed. Some of the Australian senior officers did not like it. Blamey was among them. He wrote an appreciation for Monash, in which he asserted that tanks were "not most suitable for an operation with a limited objective." The troops

would be uncertain, he said, whether the tanks would come up in time, whereas the infantry knew and trusted the method of attacking under artillery cover. These arguments, which represented the views of other of Monash's trusted subordinates also, convinced him that a change must be made. He made it, and the operation was a brilliant success. The artillery barrage was employed, with infantry following up, supported by tanks. Thus, a model was established which was used until the end of the war for attacks combining the virtues of artillery, infantry, and tanks.

It would be folly to pretend, on the evidence of such episodes as this, that Monash was the figurehead, Blamey the unseen genius who made him. Monash was a man of infinite military wisdom, and Blamey learned from him lessons he was to remember and apply, not only in the first war, but also in the second war, when he commanded forces more than three times as great as those under Monash's control in France. In fact, Monash was Blamey's second great military mentor, as Brudenell White was his first.

Blamey could hardly have had a better, in this phase of his growth. Lloyd George, Britain's Prime Minister in the deciding stages of the first war, remarked of Monash later that he was "the most resourceful General in the whole of the British Army." Discussing Field-Marshal Lord Haig's shortcomings as Commander-in-Chief, Lloyd George wrote: "Unfortunately the British Army did not bring into prominence any Commander who, taking him all round, was more conspicuously fitted for the post. No doubt Monash would, if the opportunity had been given him, have risen to the height of it. But the greatness of his abilities was not brought to the attention of the Cabinet in any of the dispatches. Professional soldiers could hardly be expected to advertise the fact that the greatest strategist in the Army was a civilian when the war began, and that they were being surpassed by a man who had not received any of their advantages in training and teaching."

Blamey was not a grudging, though he was never an eloquent, admirer of true quality. He esteemed many British commanders, notably General Sir Henry (later Lord) Rawlinson, commander of the Fourth Army. But it was in those months of 1918, when Monash was doing the work which won him Lloyd George's belated tribute, that Blamey conceived a suspicion of the disinterestedness of what cynics among Dominion soldiers sometimes call "the Union of British Generals." He was to carry the suspicion into the second war and express it, at times, in emphatic terms.

Blamey was a martinet; but he was not altogether inflexible. Monash's first corps headquarters was in a chateau, set in a gracious

forest park, on the edge of the French village of Bertangles. A. N. Kemsley, Cecil Fletcher and two or three other high-spirited younger officers enlivened the atmosphere one warm summer night by luring one of their number from a first-floor room in which he was working on Intelligence reports, intending to carry him down the majestic curved stairway and dump him on the lawn. The officer chosen to suffer this indignity was Captain Rupert Wertheim, the Australian tennis international and a renowned amateur billiards player.

"Sos" Wertheim, a large and muscular man, was seized by the conspirators and whirled down the stairway. However, he put up a terrific fight, and on the landing at the turn of the stairs one of his feet broke free. His boot plunged through the canvas of a huge gold-framed oil painting on the wall which looked down with disapproval on the unseemly struggle. The practical jokers heard the thud of feet hurrying along the corridor above and Blamey's voice shouting, "What's all this? What's going on here?" They dropped Wertheim and fled. Wertheim suffered a tongue-lashing from Blamey, but when the damaged painting disappeared from the wall, to be secreted in the cellars of the chateau, Blamey did not so much as mention its absence. He knew that, in wartime, young men must act as young men, and that no application of disciplinary measures could repair the damage caused by a misplaced boot.

He had, too, bigger matters on his mind. He never rested from the task of moulding his staff to the near-perfection he required of them. Long before his appointment to Corps Headquarters, he had realised the importance of training for staff duties young officers with regimental experience in the field. He was a hard driver, but his pupils, and the fighting soldiers, profited by it. One of those he trained was Captain John Rogers, who was to serve Blamey in a series of senior Intelligence posts in the Second World War. Rogers, then twenty-three, was G.S.O. III (Operations) of Corps Headquarters when the Battle of Hamel was fought. He had the task of co-ordinating the move of the troops to the operations area. He was proud of the orders he had written, and when Blamey asked him, on the eve of the attack, "Well, how has the move gone?" Rogers replied, "As far as I can see, everything has gone according to Hoyle, sir."

"How do you know?" Blamey asked.

"I don't think anything could have gone wrong," said Rogers.

"It's not only your job to write the orders," Blamey told him. "It's your job to see the orders are carried out. You should be there."

Blamey never did believe that a man could be a good staff officer if he spent all his time at a desk.

He worked sixteen hours a day, sometimes longer, with only an

occasional night of relaxation. He was absorbed in the multitudinous tasks of planning, in the study of such details as experiments in parachute-dropping of ammunition to isolated posts, in the evolution of tactics which were to succeed in the most spectacular manner. In short, he was playing no small part in digging the grave of the German Army.

5

The Battle of Hamel, for all the value of the gains it made, was no more than a prelude to the victories ahead. It was, in a sense, a dress rehearsal for the Battle of Amiens, which Blamey wrote later "will be told in story to future generations of boys as one of the decisive battles of the world." The great offensive, which began on August 8, 1918, was not foreseen by Marshal Foch, who ordered it, or perhaps by anybody else, as the blow which would shatter the Hindenburg Line.

A month or two later Dr. C. E. W. Bean asked Blamey whose idea originated the battle. Blamey said he rather thought the idea was his, that it arose in talk over a cup of afternoon tea with Monash. There was no great enthusiasm for it among the British higher commanders, nor was Foch altogether convinced of its timeliness. However, Monash and Blamey were insistent that the deterioration of the Germans on their front offered the chance of a break-through; and in the end Foch consented to let the theory be tested. The most optimistic officer on any Allied Staff in France could not then have brought himself to believe that victory was possible before the spring or summer of 1919. The result of the Battle of Amiens changed this conception.

The Australian and Canadian corps were the spearhead, and in the first day they tore a gap in the enemy's defences, and penetrated seven miles to the headquarters of his field commands. It was a triumph for the courage of the men in the line; but it was the preliminary organising, down to the most trifling item, that made the victory possible.

Blamey had a faculty not uncommon among eminent soldiers. He could sleep apparently at will, and wake at any instant with mind unblurred. He told his second wife he learned the trick of clearing his mind, and sleeping under stress, on the night before the August 8 attack was launched. Everybody at Corps Headquarters, including Monash and Blamey, was at a high nervous pitch, worried about the morning, apprehensive that some unforeseen factor would bring failure.

"Tonight I'm going to sleep," Blamey told himself.

He slept. Never afterwards did he have difficulty in sleeping within a few seconds of closing his eyes.

The ringing of his bedside telephone woke him ten minutes before zero hour. Captain John Rogers was telephoning from an observation post on high ground north of the Somme. He had a commanding view of the countryside.

"All quiet, sir," he reported. "No signs of activity on either side."

It was good news. It meant the enemy was unaware of the preparations for a dawn attack.

At first light six hundred guns opened fire, and the infantry moved off.

Rogers telephoned again.

"The barrage is down, sir," he said. "No reply from the enemy."

A few minutes later, when the barrage had gone forward, Rogers reported, "Still no reply from the enemy."

The battle, which marked what Ludendorff, Hindenburg's chief of staff, was later to describe as "the black day of the German Army," was the beginning of the last long step to November 11 and the Armistice. Blamey had a right to feel exalted. Monash wrote later: "Some day the series of orders which he drafted for the long series of history-making military operations, upon which we collaborated, will become a model for Staff Colleges and Schools for military instruction. They were accurate, lucid in language, perfect in detail, and always an exact interpretation of my intention. It was seldom that I thought my orders or instructions could have been better expressed."

Some years later Blamey himself wrote a footnote to the Battle of Amiens. These were his words: "General Haig asked General Monash a few days later to bring the Australian leaders to meet him. We assembled in the battered old Red Chateau in Villers-Bretonneux. The Commander-in-Chief began to speak to us. He uttered a few words of thanks and said, 'You do not know what the Australians and Canadians have done for the British Empire in these days.' He opened his mouth to continue, and halted. The tears rolled down his cheeks. A dramatic pause, and we all quietly filed out. This great leader had borne shock and strain—the disaster to the Fifth Army; then the threat of division between the British and the French; the threat, and it was a serious one, of complete German victory. He had borne all this unflinchingly and cheerfully and always he went amongst the troops with a smile—but this great occasion was too much."

It is inconceivable that Blamey foresaw, in this time of triumph, the frustrations, the pitfalls, and the personal disasters that awaited him in the years of peace.

6

RESULTS OF A MUTINY

1

BLAMEY did not guess when some six hundred Melbourne policemen mutinied in November, 1923, that the results of the affair were to have a profound influence on the course of his life.

He had returned to Australia in 1919 after helping Monash with the task of repatriating the A.I.F. Though his realistic mind never accepted the popular idea that "the war to end war" had succeeded in its purpose, he spent New Year's Eve, 1918, dining with Monash at London's Ritz Hotel and drinking champagne toasts to the brave new world ahead. Optimism about the world's future was in flower at the end of 1918.

Minnie Blamey and her two boys were living at East Malvern when Blamey came home. Nine-year-old Dolf had shadowy memories of the man in brigadier-general's uniform, but five-year-old Tom was mildly scared of the dark stranger.

Some of Blamey's friends found him aged beyond his years. He was greatly matured in demeanour and mind, a graver, and somehow a sadder, man than the young officer who had gone off to India eight years earlier bent on conquering the world. They felt he had gained in worldly wisdom, in dignity, in *savoir faire*. But some of them also felt that, on Gallipoli or the Western Front, he had lost something which he yearned to recover, but could not. He rarely discussed the war, or what it had done to him. But once he said rather wistfully to his sister-in-law Elsie Millard: "Els, I wish I had your faith!"

His military future seemed reasonably well assured. It was true that war was finished forever, that professional soldiers would now be a drug on the market. But most people, except adamant pacifists, cherished a shamefaced conviction that perhaps Australia ought to keep a kind of token army in existence in case the future for the world should turn out less rosy than it promised. So Blamey became Director of Military Operations at Army Headquarters, Melbourne, for a few months, then Deputy Chief of the General Staff. In August, 1922, he was shipped off to London, to be Colonel General Staff at the

First marriage

TOP: *Blamey behind Monash (seated), 1918*

BELOW: *Farewell, November 30, 1945*

High Commissioner's Office in Australia House, and Australian representative on the Imperial General Staff.

The London post held few adventurous possibilities for a man who had played a conspicuous part in the breaking of the Hindenburg Line. The incumbent could make it hard or easy work, according to his temperament and mood. Blamey saw to his duties with characteristic thoroughness, but he did not seek to make any deep and abiding mark.

The Blameys lived at Wimbledon. There the boys became better acquainted with their father. It was not easy, for either the father or the sons. Blamey suffered with a species of stern shyness; he found it hard to give much of himself to any other human being, not excluding his sons. Dolf and Tom always felt they had been conscientiously fitted into their father's plans, that his efforts to entertain them represented, for him, duty rather than pleasure.

He was a strict father. He controlled his boys by force of personality, as he had controlled his army subordinates, rather than by the exercise, or even the threat, of physical force. His younger son Tom remembered feeling the weight of his father's hand only once. This was on a day when Tom, his father's power of personality notwithstanding, poked out his tongue at him.

Although Blamey was ten thousand miles from home, he was not forgotten in Australia. Late in 1923 the post of Second Chief of the General Staff was added to his appointments. He was not freed to return to Australia to take over the duties of Second C.G.S.—in essentials, equivalent to the post of Deputy C.G.S.—until more than fifteen months had passed. He could have had no idea when he sailed from England that his course as a permanent soldier was all but run. If anybody had suggested he was likely to forsake the soldier's sword for the policeman's truncheon he would have laughed the thought aside. Yet so it fell out.

The causes of the police mutiny in November, 1923, matter little now. It is enough that more than six hundred members of a force about eighteen hundred strong, struck in protest against a number of long-standing grievances. Melbourne was packed with visitors for the spring race carnival, and for all of one weekend the city was left virtually unprotected, while loyal police were being drafted from the country, and a volunteer police force was got together. The hoodlum and the yahoo were in control. They were the type of young man who springs to action when the totalitarian State calls for volunteers to form its basher squads, its terror gangs, its Jew-baiting posses—the bully-boys who like to act tough when there is little risk that they

will be hit back. Windows were smashed, shops looted, citizens assaulted or menaced.

The mutiny occurred when a non-Labour Government was in office in Victoria. No impartial investigation of its causes was undertaken until a Labour Government came to power months later. The Labour Party had some sympathy with the mutineers' grievances, if not with the methods they had used to try to have these grievances remedied, and the new Ministry appointed a Royal Commission to take evidence and submit a report. The Commission found that efforts to calm the upheavals which had culminated in the mutiny had been inept, however conscientious, and that the Chief Commissioner's salary of £900 a year was too low to attract suitable applicants to the post.

No immediate action was taken to put the Royal Commission's implied recommendations into effect, but in 1925 the Chief Commissioner of Police, Alexander Nicholson, resigned. A non-Labour Ministry was now in office, and Dr. (later Sir) Stanley Argyle, Chief Secretary, had the task of nominating a successor to Nicholson. It was a worrying problem to find the right man. Argyle was taking an early morning walk in the Botanic Gardens when he met Lieut.-General Sir Harry Chauvel, Australia's wartime Light Horse leader, and Inspector-General of the Australian Military Forces from 1919 to 1930. They strolled, chatting, and Argyle told Chauvel what was bothering him.

"H'm," said Chauvel. "What about Blamey?"

Argyle's expression became thoughtful. Blamey, eh? Monash's old chief of staff, the man who was said to be an unexcelled organiser. He might be exactly the chief the police force needed.

Thus Chauvel lost an able lieutenant, the Army lost Blamey, Victoria gained a police chief, and Blamey embarked upon the most tempestuous eleven years of his life.

2

He took office on September 1, 1925. He was appointed for a term of five years at a salary of £1,500 a year.

He must have done some heart-searching before accepting Argyle's offer of the post. It meant the end of his career as a regular soldier, because he had to resign from the Army. However, many able officers were senior to him in the permanent Army list. Whatever his merits, he could not have expected to be promoted over their heads in the steady-going atmosphere of peacetime.

The police force of which Blamey took command was no smooth-running machine. As one after-effect of the mutiny, it was under-

manned. Some hundreds of young men had been recruited to fill the gaps left by the dismissal of the mutineers, but many of these rookies, though basically good material, had had to be hurriedly trained and posted to assignments while they were still unsure of themselves and their own powers. The force needed to be rebuilt, remoulded, integrated anew. Nor was the force contented. Some of the causes of grievance which had led to the mutiny had been corrected by legislation. Measures to correct others had been promised. But rates of pay were niggardly. The basic wage in Victoria was £4/7/- a week: the fledgling constable's pay was £4/4/7, which gradually rose to £5/5/3 after 10 years' service, and to £5/13/1 after 23 years. Blamey believed the minimum rate should be £1 a day. The policeman, he argued, was open to many more temptations than a man in almost any other occupation. Unless you gave him an incentive to resist temptation, you invited corruption.

"If you don't give the men more money they will get it somewhere else," he told his technical assistant, Tom Dunn.

Blamey and Dunn were men who understood each other, though they by no means agreed on every subject. The first day Blamey occupied the police chief's chair he called for S. A. Heathershaw, then secretary of the Police Department, and asked:

"Supposing I want to know something about a police matter, how do I go about it?"

"You call for a report," said Heathershaw, describing the procedure of Blamey's predecessors.

"And how long would that take?"

"About a week."

"That's no good to me. If I want to know something, I want the answer at once."

Heathershaw suggested the delay could be eliminated if Blamey were to appoint a technical assistant. Dunn, a tall, rangy, long-headed police officer, who retired in 1944 with the rank of superintendent, was chosen. Blamey kept Dunn beside him from beginning to end of his Chief Commissionership. Their relationship had much in common with the relationship that evolved between Monash and Blamey in France. In practice, Dunn became Blamey's chief of staff; and not only his technical assistant, but also a close friend. Blamey took more heed of Dunn's opinion on police matters in general than of any other man's. For example, he was deeply sympathetic with the police mutineers, though he never advertised the fact.

The mutineers had formed an association, which met regularly, held an occasional public demonstration, and otherwise pressed for its members' reinstatement. Blamey told Dunn he would like to see

the mutineers forgiven, and sworn in again with their old ranks and numbers.

"Their grievances were just," he said, "even if they went the wrong way about calling attention to them."

"If you reappoint these men you will be making a tremendous mistake," Dunn said. "You'll have a divided police force for the next thirty years—the strikers and the 'scabs.'"

Blamey, against his own inclinations, bowed to Dunn's advice.

Dunn, like many men who served under Blamey in the Army, never found him reluctant to change a decision if he was persuaded he had acted without knowing all the facts. He often said to Dunn, "Only a fool persists when he knows he is wrong." However, he would not listen to Dunn's advice about police dogs.

Dogs, like most dumb creatures, were something of a passion with Blamey. He went into the force with a preconceived notion, largely founded on popular magazine articles he had read, that trained dogs could be used to good effect in Victorian police work. He discussed the idea with Dunn. Dunn said he considered more nonsense had been talked and written about police dogs than about any other given subject. Blamey was terse: he wanted police dogs, and police dogs he insisted on having. He ordered some theoretically suitable dogs to be obtained and schooled for police work. He was deeply interested in the progress of the experiment. This was one of his pet ideas, and it *must* succeed.

One night a demonstration of the dogs' skill was staged in the Botanic Gardens before a police audience. Blamey was in the forefront. A dog was given a coat to sniff, then set the task of finding the coat's owner, who was hidden in a thicket some distance away. The animal inhaled the man-smell of the coat, pricked his ears, trotted over to a bush and saluted it in the immemorial manner of dogs, then stood wagging his tail. Blamey's comments are not on record, but after this episode his interest in police dogs sharply declined.

But such little fads did not dominate Blamey's mind. His main objective was to organise a police force thoroughly equipped and trained to do the work of keeping the peace.

3

He had hardly made a start when the first of the storms that were to punctuate his career as a police administrator broke about him. Most of these storms were to be political in origin; the first of them was strictly personal in origin, though it quickly became a political issue. It began with whispers inside the police force. These grew

stronger, until they reached the public. Soon Melbourne was buzzing with rumours about the Badge 80 affair.

Three constables of the licensing squad, C. C. J. Thomas, H. Birrell, and J. McEwan, raided "Belgrave," a house in Bell-street, Fitzroy, about 11.30 on the night of Wednesday, October 21, 1925. The tenant was a former actress, Mabel Tracey, who declared herself on a brass plate to be a teacher of elocution; but the house was known to the police less as a cradle of dramatic art than as a place of assignation frequented by the more or less socially elect. The policemen made a written report describing circumstances in which they found two couples in different rooms. They recorded that one of the men said, "That is all right, boys. I am a plain-clothes constable. Here is my badge." He showed them a small silver badge, such as was issued to police officers. This badge bore the number 80. Badge 80 was on issue to Blamey.

The Government chose to ignore the affair. Then a Labour member in the Legislative Council asked a series of questions which dragged the skeleton from the cupboard. A Government spokesman, replying to these questions in the House, said: "By direction of the Chief Secretary, the Acting Superintendent, Mr. Warren, held an inquiry, and it was found that prior to the raid police medal No. 80 had been removed from the possession of the Commissioner. Later it was surreptitiously returned to Brigadier-General Blamey. Every effort has been made to find the person who on that occasion had the medal in his possession and to trace who was responsible for the theft, but the inquiries have failed to solve the question. It has been conclusively proved, however, that the medal was not used by the Chief Commissioner on the occasion in question."

The official file held statutory declarations by the three constables, Thomas, Birrell, and McEwan. All three denied that Blamey was the man who had shown them the police badge in the room at "Belgrave." A statement by Colonel Walter Farr, a close friend of Blamey, was also on the file. Farr stated he had called at Blamey's home soon after nine o'clock on the night of October 21, and stayed there talking with Blamey until twenty minutes before the Fitzroy raid took place.

Superintendent A. Warren, the investigating police officer, recorded that Badge 80 "was surreptitiously removed from the General's keyring about 20th October, a day before the police raid, and was on the 23rd inst. found by the General in his letterbox at the [Naval and Military] Club, enclosed in an envelope. Who had it between these periods I am unable to discover. That it was not the General is proven without any doubt. The three constables are emphatic."

Demands in Parliament for an official inquiry into the circum-

stances of the incident were rejected by the Government, and on this note the official record closed.

However, there is an unofficial background to the Badge 80 affair. It involves a conflict of wills between Blamey and Superintendent Daniel Linehan, then metropolitan superintendent at police headquarters. The first report reached Linehan three days after the "Belgrave" raid took place. Blamey learned on the Monday, two days later, that the report was in Linehan's office. He telephoned Linehan and said: "I understand you have a report about Medal 80?"

"Yes," said Linehan.

"I want it sent over at once," Blamey said.

"I'm not going to send it over," Linehan said.

"If you don't, I shall suspend you," Blamey told him.

Linehan then personally delivered the report to Blamey. While they were discussing it, Blamey remarked that Badge 80 had been stolen from him two days before the raid.

"It was on your table between 4.30 and 4.35 p.m. on October 21, seven hours before the raid," said Linehan. He claimed to have seen the badge while he and Blamey were discussing police business.

This clash undoubtedly played a part in the emergence of the Badge 80 affair as a subject of public gossip and political dispute.

And where was Blamey on the night of October 21? He dined that evening in the Naval and Military Club. After dinner he was going down the stairs with a first war comrade, Stanley Savige, who was to become a lieutenant-general and a corps commander in the second war. A Sydney visitor—a first war officer who had served with Blamey in France—was coming up the stairs, and he hailed them.

"Have you got any grog in your locker, Tom?" he asked.

"Yes," Blamey said. "Here's my key."

He fumbled in his pocket, and produced a ring holding three or four keys and Police Badge 80. He handed the ring to his friend, saying he would collect it from his pigeonhole next day, then left the club with Savige, and took his way home.

When the storm burst he refused to tell the story, which Savige was ready to confirm. The man to whom Blamey had handed the keyring was married and the father of three school-age children. Rather than implicate him, Blamey preferred to brazen it out, with the aid of a not over-plausible lie. It was in character with his oftentimes stupidly quixotic sense of personal loyalty. He might have hesitated before committing himself had he known that the echoes of the Badge 80 affair were to haunt him throughout his police force days; in fact, to the end of his life.

Anyway, he himself could never understand why his actions as a

private individual should be confused with his obligations as a public man.

"I don't think anybody has any right to say anything about my private life," he once said to Tom Dunn. "If I had my way, Tom, I'd build an eighteen-foot wall around myself and permit nobody to look beyond it."

The indivisibility of the private and official lives of the man in public office was something he never did succeed in recognising.

4

An army officer who becomes a police chief is always open to suspicion until he demonstrates his understanding of the fact that the police are not at war with the public. Blamey understood this subtle difference between military and police operations. If some of his men were occasionally heavy-handed it was in spite, not because, of the spirit he tried to encourage.

To describe the programme of reorganisation which, piece by piece, year by year, Blamey put into effect would be tedious. Among his reforms were decentralisation of the Criminal Investigation Branch, development of wireless patrols, establishment of a provident fund, and the launching of a plan for remodelling police headquarters. His experiments with the promotion system were less happy. He introduced a plan of accelerated promotion, which pleased some members of the force and permanently embittered others. Most of the principles of the Blamey plan have since been scrapped, because accelerated promotion by merit, however logical it might appear in theory, is capable in the realm of practical police work of doing violence to the rights of able and conscientious men. It tends to retard the justifiable advancement of the policeman engaged on essential, but unspectacular, duty; it opens the door to favouritism, or persecution, for reasons unconnected with the individual's ability or industry. Blamey could not, or would not, see the dangers of his system, but only its merits. He insisted on applying it and thereby created resentments in the force which were not soothed for many years after he ceased to be police chief. However, he was able to console himself with the reflection that every Chief Commissioner who had tried to alter the promotion system for the better had succeeded only in burning his fingers.

He enforced his will relentlessly. Blamey had no mercy for any member of the force who tried to thwart a decision he had taken for what he believed to be the good conduct of police affairs. Whether the man was a senior officer or a simple constable, he found himself trans-

ferred to duties where he could no longer hamper Blamey's plans. Policemen dubbed the Mildura district "Siberia," because it became a place of exile for Blamey's intractables.

Believing there was no room in the force for an organisation which had something of the character of a trade union, he smashed the Police Association, and reconstituted it with teeth drawn.

He was the supreme commander, the final appeal court. Any policeman who challenged his authority could expect no clemency; nor was any Minister of the Crown permitted to deny Blamey's right to exercise his statutory powers.

He recommended an inspector's dismissal for disciplinary reasons. The Premier of the day told Blamey that Cabinet had decided not to sanction the dismissal. Blamey replied that Cabinet would be wise to reconsider the decision, otherwise he would give the facts to the newspapers. Cabinet agreed that Blamey should have his way. Another inspector was ordered by Blamey to a country station. The Premier telephoned Blamey and said the inspector must not be transferred.

"You read the Police Regulations, and you will see I can transfer him," Blamey said. And he did.

He would never abandon what appeared to be a sound idea merely because someone said it could not be put into effect. An epidemic of car-thieving occurred in Melbourne, and the Royal Automobile Club urged that the police should make disposal of stolen cars more difficult by issuing a form of title deed for each registered motor vehicle. The suggested method was too complex, but Blamey believed the principle was good. He devised a plan for the issue of a simple type of owner's certificate, and told Tom Dunn to see that the Motor Registration Branch adopted it. Dunn reported to Blamey that the officer in charge of the branch said that it couldn't be done.

"Why can't it be done?" Blamey demanded. "Come with me!"

They drove to the Motor Registration Branch together and found the officer in charge. Blamey outlined his idea in a few words, and said:

"It can be done, and it's got to be done."

It was done. The system of owners' certificates devised by Blamey was one of his legacies to Victorian motorists and the force.

He was an autocrat, but a tolerably benevolent one, unless a subordinate challenged his authority. At times, though these were few, he was benevolent even with criminals. He had a kind of sporting instinct which made him dislike the systematic harassing even of a man with a bad police record if he was persuaded the man was trying to mend his ways. Tom Dunn's barrister son, Ray Dunn, once went to

Blamey with a plea for James Coates, a swindler, gambler, and notorious underworld graduate, whose life was ended by an assassin's bullet on a vacant allotment at Windsor, a Melbourne suburb, on a night of July, 1947.

Coates had returned from a professional visit to Europe rich with the proceeds of two impudent swindles, which had netted him £70,000. He was anything but a welcome prodigal in the eyes of Blamey's detectives. Frank Lyon, later Superintendent of the Criminal Investigation Branch, and at that time leader of the Consorting Squad, determined to make Coates sorry he had come home. Coates was an ardent racegoer, and had even bought a racehorse with some of his dubious fortune. Always immaculately dressed, and usually smoking one of the expensive cigars he imported for his own use, he had all the appearance of a wealthy man-about-town. But the Consorting detectives were not fooled: they suspected he was up to his neck in Turf rackets. They warned him to keep away from racecourses, or take the consequences.

Coates went to Ray Dunn for legal advice. He told Dunn he was trying to make a clean start in life, and was finished with crime forever. Coates, then in the early thirties, was, as befitted a swindler of his calibre, a hypnotic talker. He persuaded Dunn of his pure intentions, and Dunn decided to appeal to Blamey. After listening to Dunn's plea, Blamey ruled that Coates must be given a chance to prove the sincerity of his professed wish to reform. Lyon, who had had long experience of the ways of criminals, believed Coates to be a thoroughly bad hat; but Blamey would not listen.

"Let Coates have a run," he said.

Coates's later actions proved Lyon to have been right and Blamey wrong. But at least he seems to have been wrong for the right reasons.

He was not plagued by the average layman's desire to borrow Lord Peter Wimsey's mantle and play at crime detection. He considered his job was to organise the force; he left sleuthing to the men who were trained to do it.

He strove untiringly to promote educational and sporting activities in the force. He believed nothing could do more to strengthen *esprit de corps* in a large body of men than team games, such as football and cricket, and, on the intellectual plane, debating. He was an energetic, if not notably skilful, participant in many a police sporting match. In one such game he captained an officers' cricket eleven playing the sergeants on the Police Depot ground. When Tom Dunn came out to bat for the sergeants, Blamey exulted: "I'm going to bowl to this fellow myself."

The wickedest ball Blamey could contrive was an innocuous

donkey-drop, while Dunn had won some small fame as a cricketer in his younger days. He lifted the first six balls out of the ground for six runs apiece. He was preparing to hit the last two balls of the over out of the ground also; but Blamey, the tactician, was too smart for him. The last two balls were far beyond the batsman's reach—though the umpire, under the spell of Blamey's eye, helpfully refrained from "calling" them as wides.

Altogether Blamey was well liked in the force except by men who suffered under his promotion scheme or, wittingly or unwittingly, displeased him. Some, even among his admirers, felt he was too ready to take the side of officer against man whenever an issue arose. But most of his men recognised that, though physically he was about the smallest man in the force, 1½in. short of the standard height requirement of 5ft. 8in., he was in intellect and personality far and away the biggest man among them.

He would always lean over backwards to help forward any old soldier of the first war, who, like himself, had exchanged khaki for blue. The war held a lasting significance for Blamey. Armistice Day was the single day of the year on which he was inaccessible before one o'clock. Until that hour he was incommunicado in his office. This was about his only display of emotion. Even when his son Dolf was killed in a R.A.A.F. plane crash in New South Wales, he hid his grief.

Blamey was visiting Sydney when Dolf, a regular Air Force officer, was killed on December 6, 1932. He hurried to Richmond, where the accident occurred. Not for an instant did his self-control falter; yet his intimates saw tears spring to his eyes when Dolf's name was mentioned ten or fifteen years later. Until his death he kept a photograph of the boy with him.

Blamey lacked one talent which has enabled many a man of otherwise moderate gifts to achieve high success in life: he did not understand the art of compromise. If he wanted something, he would smash down every obstacle that stood in the way of his getting it. It was the prompting of this spirit that caused him to make an alteration in police practice which brought him to grips with the Press and more or less sealed his ultimate downfall.

Blamey had never much liked the Press. He thought it wasted too much printers' ink on trivialities, that it showed an undesirable disposition to intrude in personal affairs, that it published much information which did not help the public interest—in short, that it deserved to be regimented. As far as the police force was concerned, he decided to regiment it. When Blamey took office the newspaper roundsmen working at police headquarters were allowed wide

freedom in gathering their news. Blamey did not like this haphazard policy.

He believed that some detectives who were liberal with information were, as a reward, being personally publicised, while other men, less ready to talk or because they were doing less spectacular work, were missing the limelight. He considered that Press lionisation of a few men and the virtual exclusion of others were causes of disharmony which the force could not afford. He also suspected that some policemen were being bribed to give information to the Press. Blamey's biggest objection was to the leakage of information whose premature publication at times compromised the work of men engaged in crime detection. He determined to stop it. He issued instructions that only certain authorised spokesmen were to discuss police matters with the Press; any infringement of this rule would be severely punished.

The newspapers reacted with some violence. Blamey found himself and the force under more or less constant Press attack, not on the issue of news control, but on every inevitable mistake, great or small. He would not abate his policy. He had acted on a principle, and he would not vary it. His order stood. It stands, like many other changes he made in the police system, to this day.

It was about this time that one of his friends, who admired much in Blamey but understood his human shortcomings, said to him over dinner:

"You know, Tom, you have to be a very innocent man to buck the Press!"

"I'm not afraid of the Press," Blamey retorted.

He was to remember the conversation when his life as a policeman drew to its crisis.

5

The Labour Party had never liked him. They saw him as an arch-disciple of reaction. His policemen were accused from time to time of having dispersed working-class demonstrations with unjustifiable force, of having exercised in a somewhat high-handed manner their obligations to maintain public order. But Blamey, though not without a dash of the authoritarian in his nature, was overwhelmingly a champion of democratic principles.

He had an unenviable job to do as police chief in the economic depression of the early 1930s. It was Blamey who had to preserve the peace in Victoria when men who wanted work, and could not get it were clamouring for their rights. The problem of how to do this without occasional use of violence might have baffled Solomon him-

self. Politico-military organisations, which owed something to Hitler's Nazis and Mussolini's Fascists, were born in Australia at this period of economic misery. Melbourne and Sydney each had its specimen of them. Blamey would have no truck with any of them.

The future Lieutenant-General Sir Stanley Savige was then commanding a militia unit in a Melbourne suburb. One night a fascist strong-arm squad seized control of Savige's drill hall. Savige went to Blamey, who told him to use any measures he might choose to restore his authority.

"As far as the police are concerned," he said, "I've told them that if the unemployed march through Melbourne and cause a breach of the peace they're to hit them over the heads with their batons. As for these other fellows, I've told the police to hit 'em three times!"

However, his post had become something of a political football. He had narrowly escaped the axe when his first term as Chief Commissioner expired. His salary was reduced by the Labour Government then in office until it was below £800 a year—about half the reward he had been offered to quit the Army for the police force. When Argyle, the man who had selected Blamey as police chief, went back into office at the head of his own Ministry in May, 1932, he restored the salary to £1,500 a year. A year later he appointed Blamey Chief Commissioner for life.

Blamey must have felt, after eight years on the edge of a volcano, which threatened to erupt whenever the party political colour of the Victorian Government changed, that the way ahead was clear at last. He could not have guessed that his police career had less than three years to run.

Late on the night of Friday, May 22, 1936, Inspector Alexander T. McKerral, deputy chief officer of the Criminal Investigation Branch, hurried out to Blamey's home. He brought word that John O'Connell Brophy, superintendent of the C.I.B., had been wounded in a shooting affray, and was lying in St Vincent's Hospital. Brophy's right arm was broken; he had other wounds in a cheek and above the heart. The circumstances were that Brophy, accompanied by two women friends and a chauffeur employed by one of them, had driven to Royal Park to meet a police informer. While they were waiting for the informer two masked and armed men tried to hold them up. Brophy drew his pistol and fired two shots. The men fired back, and Brophy was wounded.

Blamey called at the hospital on his way to his office at police headquarters next morning. Brophy told him, Blamey swore later, that the shooting had been accidental, but admitted that two women

had been with him at the time. At headquarters Blamey saw McKerral, who later issued a Press statement that Brophy "was accidentally shot in the forearm whilst handling his revolver." The facts were hidden until later editions of the Melbourne *Herald* appeared on the streets that evening. These carried a report that Brophy's wounds had not been accidentally caused.

The cat was out of the bag. Next day police headquarters admitted that Brophy had been wounded by bandits. The shooting now took on a sinister appearance it should never have borne—not because there was anything odd about the wounding of a police officer on duty, but because such determined, if clumsy, efforts had been made to conceal the truth from public knowledge.

The Premier of the day was Albert Dunstan, leading a Country Party Ministry which depended for survival on Labour good will. Dunstan knew he would not displease Labour by having an investigation made into an affair which had become a public scandal. Eleven days after the shooting he appointed a Royal Commission to determine the facts. The Commissioner was Judge Hugh Macindoe, a Dumbartonshire Scotsman. He had been Victoria's senior Crown Prosecutor for seven years before his elevation to the County Court Bench; he therefore had a knowledge of police methods which peculiarly fitted him to investigate a matter in which police administration was the real issue. Macindoe sat for eleven days and examined forty-four witnesses including Blamey and Brophy. He found there had been "nothing immoral or improper in Brophy's conduct." But he also commented:

"Having regard to the fact that Sir Thomas Blamey knew the number and nature of the wounds, I cannot accept his evidence that he believed it was an accident. . . . I believe that, being jealous of the reputation of the force, which he commands, he thought that that reputation might be endangered if the whole truth was disclosed."

Macindoe, who had been invalided home from Gallipoli, where he served as a lieutenant with the 23rd Battalion, had an old soldier's admiration for Blamey's military accomplishments, but on the facts he could have returned no other finding. Years later he told a friend: "I was tremendously impressed with Blamey, as I saw him in the witness box. I tried my best to steer him to the true story, but he was immovable. I couldn't save him from himself."

Blamey had weathered some angry storms since entering the police force, but never one so violent as that roused by the publication of Macindoe's report. It was no consolation to him to reflect that he had been actuated throughout the affair by personally disinterested motives.

"Well, Dunn," he said to Tom Dunn when the finding was delivered, "you were right about Brophy, and I was wrong."

He was referring to a conversation in which Dunn had advised him not to appoint Brophy to the post of C.I.B. superintendent. Blamey had answered, "Get along, Dunn! You're just a narrow-minded policeman."

Macindoe submitted his finding on July 2. Six days later Ray Dunn, Tom Dunn's lawyer son, was summoned to Blamey's office early in the afternoon.

"Look at this, Dunn," Blamey said, displaying a letter signed by the Premier. "These little things are sent to try us!"

The letter told Blamey he could not, in view of Macindoe's finding, continue to hold the post of Chief Commissioner of Police. Reading the words, Dunn knew there was no way of escape; but Blamey, who suffered nearly every man's inability to judge his own cause, would not admit defeat.

"I shan't resign," he said. "Let them sack me! I'll put a counter-blast in the Press."

Eugene Gorman K.C., whom Blamey had found to be a sage legal adviser in the past, was called from a race meeting he was attending. Gorman, apart from his legal wisdom, had a background which made him a good emissary. He had earlier done a number of valuable services for the Country Party, and he had some sway with Dunstan. Gorman, like Dunn, saw that if Blamey were to fight he would be fighting a lost cause. He had delivered himself into the hands of his enemies, who were saying, "Here is a chance to rid ourselves of this turbulent Chief Commissioner." However, something might be saved from the wreckage. Blamey's savings totalled no more than a few hundred pounds, and he had little hope of finding another post carrying a salary comparable with the Chief Commissioner's. If he were dismissed, he would have no pension rights; if he resigned, the Government might be persuaded to grant him a pension.

Gorman and Dunn interviewed newspaper proprietors, politicians, men behind the scenes in politics. They found Dunstan adamant on the issue.

"I shall take your suggestion of the resignation and pension," Dunstan said. "Otherwise, the dismissal goes through."

Next morning Gorman called early at Blamey's office. The Executive Council was to meet that afternoon, and an Order-in-Council dismissing Blamey had already been drafted. Gorman had seen a copy of it. There was only one way Blamey could prevent the Order-in-Council from being put into effect: that was to resign.

"He has to go and resign," Gorman told Tom Dunn. "If he doesn't

resign he's finished for all time—not only in the police force, but in any other public office."

Gorman foresaw, though Blamey did not, that dismissal in such circumstances as these would mean that any public post, including a senior appointment in the armed forces in time of war, would be closed to him. The thread on which Blamey's future fortune, even his field-marshal's baton, depended on that morning of July 9, 1936, was frail, indeed.

Blamey was still adamant when Gorman went into his room. He would not resign, he would fight to a finish. Gorman understood Blamey's character. He knew how hard it was possible to press him, when to cajole, when to threaten. They argued for some hours, and at last Blamey saw the light. He had no alternative. Gorman had been able to convince him that he could either stand firm and be ignominiously dismissed, or resign gracefully and be granted a pension of £5 a week.

Blamey's resignation was in Cabinet's hands only about fifteen minutes before the Executive Council met at four that afternoon.

Some years later Blamey was to say to one of his trusted A.I.F. officers: "It was probably a good thing for my character. The higher you go the harder you fall. The fall brings you back to earth." But such philosophical resignation was hardly to be expected of him when the blow had just struck.

That evening Blamey, surrounded by a few friends who had not deserted him in the hour of defeat, was a guest in the Hotel Australia offices of Fred Matear, the Melbourne hotelier. Somebody tuned the radio to the early evening news broadcast. Almost the first item was an announcement that Executive Council had accepted Blamey's resignation and appointed Superintendent W. W. Mooney to act as Chief Commissioner. Matear hurriedly moved across to the radio and switched off the power. He did not know if Blamey had heard the words which disclosed to every listener the fact that, at fifty-two, his life as a public man was smashed to fragments. If Blamey had heard them, he did not betray himself by the flicker of an eyelid.

That night Blamey dined with two old friends, John and Pegg Williams, in their city flat. Williams, a working journalist, was one of the few newspapermen with whom Blamey was friendly. The telephone rang for Blamey. He exchanged a few words with the caller, then hung up the receiver and said, "I have to go." The Williamses were puzzled until Blamey explained what the caller had told him.

"Some of my old sergeants at Russell Street are talking strike, as a protest against my axe-ing," he said. "I'm not going to have men

on six or seven pounds a week putting their heads on the block for me. I'm off to talk them out of it."

Blamey hurried to police headquarters and saw the men who were threatening direct action. There was no strike.

6

The end of Blamey's reign as Chief Commissioner of Police was the beginning of the bitterest, and most sterile, period of his life. He faced his friends, and particularly his foes, with untroubled eyes, and few of them guessed at the anguish of mind he suffered; but the wound to his pride, though he hid it, was raw and deep. Those of his friends who were aware of the harshness of his plight knew the man too well to exhibit the sympathy they felt: Blamey was made in such a mould that he could have borne sympathy even less easily than he bore the gloating of enemies.

It was not only his straitened circumstances that made life trying for him; rather, it was the knowledge that he had no useful place in the world, the realisation that his talents were suddenly valueless, that he was an unwanted man. He made a show of cultivating his business interests; but these were inconsiderable, for Blamey had never been able to accumulate the capital required to undertake large commercial ventures. He also experimented with writing; but little that he wrote earned a cheque to help his thin purse, or even found the dignity of print without payment.

For the first year after his police downfall he filled many of his over-numerous spare hours with the work of commanding the 3rd Division, a militia formation. As a militia officer, he had led the division since 1931. The command of an Australian volunteer division between the wars, anyway until the events of Munich re-awakened the military ardour of the nation's young men, was a task to test the endurance of even a strong and optimistic spirit. Blamey, no less than any other General Officer Commanding of the time, had to worry along as well as he could contrive with an ill-equipped and under-manned division, in the hope that his acceptance of the peace-time frustrations would have its reward when the inevitable war came upon the world. Yet even the meagre outlet that his abilities found as a militia commander closed to him less than twelve months after he left the police chief's chair. His tour of duty as the 3rd Division's commander ended on March 31, 1937. He relinquished command of the division, and his name was added to the Army Unemployed List.

One source of consolation did not fail him in these years of trial:

his delight in the outdoors was undiminished. Fishing always stood high among his hobbies, and he and an old friend, Lionel Lemaire, spent many a long weekend together hunting trout in little-known streams in the more primitive parts of eastern Victoria.

Their favourite stream was the Wonangarra (or Wonangatta, as some bushmen prefer it), a tributary of the Mitchell River, in the Dargo High Plains. On their expeditions to the Wonangarra they usually slept and ate in a shack on the Culhane property, often with one of the Culhane brothers, Michael or Paddy, to keep them company. The journey from Stratford to the shack had to be made through heavy timber and along rudimentary bush tracks. It was no mean physical trial, but Blamey revelled in such rugged exercises. He was always out of his bunk in the small hours and, long before dawn, wading through the Wonangarra's chill current, in pursuit of the wily trout. Lemaire found him to be an exhaustingly tireless companion. Even when he had been astir long before dawn he was always willing to sit up until midnight playing penny poker on the shack's board table, in the light of a kerosene lamp, with a "school" of the hard-bitten and eternally hopeful fossickers who spent their lives washing the sands of the mountain streams in search of gold.

But nobody, and least of all Blamey himself, could have believed that the life he lived at this time was anything but a waste of his great abilities. He made the best of it, but the unwanted idleness chafed at his spirit. And to all but the most steadfast of his admirers he seemed to be fulfilling the destiny awarded to old soldiers by the time-honoured song: he was "simply fading away," not physically, but as a figure of public significance. The truest of his friends could not delude themselves into a conviction that his fiddlings with odds-and-ends of business or his achievements as a bush angler justified his existence. Yet it seemed that he could hope for little better until the end of his days. It was a miserable ending for the man whose military career had opened with so much brilliance.

His engagement as a special radio commentator by 3UZ, Melbourne, early in 1938 was the first, if a small, break in the clouds. Blamey, starved of an outlet for his energies, flung himself into the work with all the might of his great enthusiasm. Unidentified by the public at large, he spoke from 3UZ under the name of "The Sentinel" for eighteen months, addressing himself to a nation and its political leaders, who, with a few exceptions, appeared to be blind to the dangers posed by a resurgent Germany and an ambitious Japan, a nation who acted as though they believed that if only they wished hard enough "peace in our time" would be achieved. At this time Australians still tended to look toward Europe as the anvil of their

national destiny. They thought about the Far East—Australia's near north—only when it forced itself on their attention. This was an old habit of mind, which had endured for too long, and the emphasis Blamey laid in his radio talks on the danger to Australia inherent in the growing vigour of Japan's expansionism was a powerful factor in changing it.

Discussing Japan's undeclared war on China in his Sunday evening session, on May 15, 1938, Blamey said: "We are profoundly, even vitally, affected by these developments. It is by no means too much to say that no international questions are so profoundly interesting or so vital to us in Australia as these. Japan is growing and bursting out of her bounds. Our people only dimly see the menace which is at our doors."

He spoke persistently in such terms, trying to wake Australians to the inevitability of the Pacific storm which was to break in December, 1941. And he recognised the nature of totalitarianism for what it was at a time when many of his hearers believed, perhaps because they wished to believe, that it was a type of government well suited to the temperamental needs of the nations that adopted it, instead of a form of conspiracy against world peace.

"The conditions of national safety today," he told his audience in the last weeks of 1938, "are the same as those of tribal safety in ancient times—constant vigilance, and the maximum strength to resist. Without these, neither time nor space can avail. Time conditioned by distance has lost much of its safety value in this century."

After Hitler's seizure of Czechoslovakia in March, 1939, Blamey pointed the way not only for Australia but for the free world. "As this power has been unleashed," he said, "there remains for the rest of us to ensure only that we develop such power as will persuade the Germans that our view of right will be maintained at all costs."

However, Blamey was still, no less than at any time since his public eclipse, a forgotten man; at least, for all practical purposes. Yet he was not wholly forgotten, though Neville Chamberlain had to fly to Munich to meet Hitler before Blamey was to come out of the shadows. It was then that his star really began to shine anew.

His appointment, first as chairman of Australia's Manpower Committee, and soon afterwards as Controller-General of Recruiting, marked the beginning of the end of the bitter years, the beginning of Blamey's journey back into his own. The final act in his restoration was accomplished on that day of September 28, 1939, when he was named General Officer Commanding the 6th Division, A.I.F.

It was a day of triumph for the erstwhile forgotten man. It was also a stroke of high good fortune for Australia at war.

7

MEDITERRANEAN MISSION

1

BLAMEY'S appointment to lead the Second A.I.F. overseas surprised most Australians. After all, he had left the regular Army nearly fifteen years before, and had been under a public cloud for most of the three years before the outbreak of war. But the Government, Australians decided with a shrug, probably knew what it was doing.

Blamey's appointment was more than a surprise to two or three officers of high seniority and wide experience in the Army. Each of these men had seen himself, no doubt for reasons which seemed valid enough, in command of the A.I.F. It was hard for them to believe that a Government of intelligent men could have let themselves be blinded to the public record of this fellow Blamey, whatever military virtues he may have displayed in the past.

However, there was no way round the accomplished fact. Blamey, the more or less forgotten man, was back in uniform. The raising of the 6th Division, "Blamey's Mob" ("I was proud to lead such a mob," Blamey was to say later) was under way.

Blamey established headquarters in Melbourne. He gathered the nucleus of a staff which was to serve him, with few exceptions, throughout the war. It included such officers as Clive Steele (Engineers), Samuel Burston (Medical), Colin Simpson (Signals), C. E. M. Lloyd (Administration), all of whom were to finish the war as major-generals. It included one or two others who were to finish the war in eclipse.

Blamey knew there were lions in his path. The A.I.F. was something of an orphan in its early months. It had to fight the Army Commands in each State for camp sites and equipment; it even had to fight them, not always successfully, for the release of militia officers who wished to enlist for service overseas. Such obstructions were a constant irritation, but Blamey, who was capable of almost oriental patience when nothing else would serve his ends, knew he must practise patience now.

Colonel (later Major-General) Burston, then Assistant Director

of Medical Services for the 6th Division, came to him one day fuming over the tone of a frustrating letter from Army Headquarters.

"I think this is one of the most damnable things I've ever seen, and we ought to fight it," Burston stormed.

"Now look here," Blamey said, "we'll be leaving Australia soon, and when we have the A.I.F. abroad we shall do things as we think they should be done. Until then we don't want to run foul of Army Headquarters more than we have to." Burston glowered his impatience with such restraint. Blamey caught the grimace, and said: "I have one very good principle in life. It's this: don't buy into fights unless you have to. In the next few years you will get into a good many fights not of your own making. Never buy into one unless you know you are going to win it."

The war was not much older before Burston agreed with every word Blamey had spoken.

This philosophy did not mean that Blamey neglected to arm himself for fights which experience told him were likely to arise sooner or later. In the first war he had noted a tendency by British commanders to forget, or ignore, the fact that the Dominions were no longer colonies. He believed the commander of a Dominions military force serving under a British commander-in-chief must have legal powers which would enable him to assert his authority to the hilt if the need to do so should arise. For Blamey, though an admirer of Britain, was first of all an Australian to the innermost core of his being, and a proud one, who would, and did, fight for the rights of the Australians he commanded in the teeth of Winston Churchhill himself.

He took steps to see that his Charter from the Government was as watertight as Australia's most able legal brains could make it. To put the final touches to it, he enlisted the aid of Sir Owen Dixon, then a member of the High Court of Australia Bench, and later its Chief Justice. The finished Charter was a model of simplicity and lucidity. One sentence prescribed that no part of the A.I.F. was "to be detached or employed apart from the force" without the consent of the General Officer Commanding. Blamey was to have need more than once in the Middle East of the power to protect the integrity of the A.I.F. which was placed in his hands by these words.

He had not been long in Palestine before he had to assert himself. He expressed it in these words, in a letter dated August 25, 1940, to the then Deputy Chief of the General Staff, Major-General (later Lieutenant-General Sir) John Northcott, postwar Governor of New South Wales:

"We have had some trifling difficulties in educating the British

staffs to an understanding that the A.I.F. is a national force, and is not available to break up into detachments all over the country. At first we had applications, and in one or two cases orders, to provide all sorts of personnel for all sorts of odd requirements. But with a little quiet persistence and a minimum of friction we were able quietly to get our point of view understood. Indeed, I am happy to say that there has been the greatest harmony, and an almost entire absence of friction, not only with the commanders themselves, but with the staffs."

Blamey's Charter was more potent than any sword, as a weapon for the defence of the Australian soldier's rights. He used it many times, to rout attacks on his own powers or the powers of his subordinate commanders. He used it also to protect the ordinary soldier from rough usage by the hands of persons who believed themselves authorised to impose upon him their ideas as to the manner in which an Australian fighting-man should be taught an understanding of discipline.

The Australians in the Middle East were often unjustly accused of misconduct, ranging from petty infractions of the military code to grossly criminal acts. The A.I.F. was not a force of plaster saints; it had a due proportion of roughnecks and scallywags. But there was a conspicuous disposition among British commanders, in areas where Australian and British formations were both present, to attribute to the Australians guilt for every breach of good order and discipline. Gavin Long, the mathematically objective editor of Australia's official war history, devoted several pages, in each of his two Middle East volumes, to an examination of the justification of these disturbing allegations. He demonstrated that most of them were false, and many others not proven. As Blamey once wrote: "It is a very convenient form of excuse for any happening to lay it on to broad Australian shoulders. But when it is not in accordance with fact it does an immense amount of harm to the relations between the various Empire forces."

Charges of brutality, and worse, were freely hurled at the Australians in the early weeks of the British occupation of Syria, after the campaign in the middle of 1941 had ended Vichy French control of that area. General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson (later Field-Marshal Lord Wilson), commanding the 9th Army, with headquarters near Beirut, wrote to Blamey: ". . . . I am asking your Commanders to let it be known that in future all cases of assault must be tried by General Court Martial. Perhaps if they get a whack of penal servitude with the first two years to be done in the Middle East it might have a deterrent effect." At this time Blamey, as Deputy Commander-in-

Chief, Middle East, was stationed in Cairo, but he still exercised general administrative control over the A.I.F. He had taken the precaution of having the accusations against his Australians thoroughly investigated, and proved to be largely unfounded. He replied to Wilson: "I am afraid that the question of discipline of the A.I.F. is entirely one for my action." He confirmed this point by enclosing for Wilson's perusal a copy of the Australian Government's instructions investing him with this authority. It was his way of saying, "Hands off!"

Luckily for Australia, Blamey was a man without illusions. He had no illusions about the battles awaiting him with his British superiors when the A.I.F. was far from Australian soil, nor about the battles in which he and his men would be involved with the armies of Hitler and Mussolini. Or at least with the armies of Hitler. Blamey did not fall into the error, common enough at that time, of mistaking Italian swagger for fighting spirit. In the first few months of the war it was fashionable to suppose that Hitler had overstepped the mark, that once the British and French came to grips with Germany the Wehrmacht would crumble: the fighting would all be over in five or six months, and we should then go back to business as usual. The idea was comforting while it lasted, but the black-and-white record of what Blamey said at the time is there for anyone to see.

"This is not going to be a walkover," he said in January, 1940. "It is going to be the most terrible thing the world has ever seen. New methods of waging warfare have created a terrific mass of fire. It is my prayer that we can stave off the full horror till next summer, when the forces of the Empire may have been built up to a higher level."

Many laymen, and even many apparently perceptive military thinkers, went far astray early in the war in their conceptions of the manner in which the conflict would be fought. There was a school of thought which saw the war as likely to be, in the main, a repetition of the 1914-18 war; another which believed that the outcome would be largely determined by air power or some factor other than a struggle of land armies. The absurdity of such theories is now manifest, but they were popular, and appealing, at that time. Blamey was not among those who cherished them. In November, 1940, in a letter to Menzies on the question of the A.I.F.'s ultimate size, he wrote:

"Looking forward I think we may take it for granted that when the armies clash ultimately in this war, the conditions of long drawn out attrition of the last war, with the consequent low wastage in manpower, are not likely to be repeated. With modern armoured formations it is difficult to see long drawn out lines protected by

wire, pill-boxes, etc., facing one another for long periods. The conditions of the present war will not give time enough to build suitable works—it can only be done in peace time, as was the Maginot Line.

"It would seem that our whole aim as far as the army is concerned should be to have ready, when the time comes, the maximum of power for the series of land struggles that must determine the issue.

"Wishful thinking leads many into the error of believing that the war will be won by a combination of the blockade and air attack. Powerful as the blockade may be, it will take a long time before its effect is fully felt unless history's teaching is false. The Germans are endeavouring to make its stranglehold less effective this time by playing up to Russia. We may be sure that their eyes are on the metal and food supplies of the Ukraine, and the oil of the Caucasus, in whatever propositions they are putting up to Russia during Molotov's present visit to Berlin.

"The Germans, too, have come to see that the air war can never finally determine the issue. They have learned this from the steadily increasing effectiveness of London's defences. The German air force is being driven ever higher into the upper air and bombing becomes increasingly haphazard in its results. These limitations will gradually become more obvious, and the bombing of a large fixed area like London, or of vessels lying in the harbour, should not deceive us. As time goes on the Germans will protect their own production centres more and more effectively. While there can be little doubt that the R.A.F. saved England from invasion, and while meticulous care is taken to ensure that results of air conflicts are not exaggerated, personal experience during the last war makes me doubtful as to the results claimed from our bombing of German production centres. The claims of young and enthusiastic pilots as to destruction by night in Germany are not so subject to check as they are in air battles over England.

"For these reasons I am sure that there is only one wise policy for us, and that is to endeavour to develop our maximum striking power with all possible rapidity ready for the clash that must come. It is a question of numbers, organisation and equipment after the attrition period, i.e., the period of naval blockade and air destruction. The time will come to force the issue on land, and it does not seem possible that British military force alone without active American assistance can develop sufficient strength to overwhelm the Germans.

"It would seem that ultimate victory depends upon two prime factors; the first is the entry of America into the actual field, and the

second the development, while time permits, of the armed forces of the Empire to their maximum strength for the struggle. . . ."

This was the tone of everything he said of the war, and what lay ahead of the world at that time. Whatever the future might hold, he did not go into it with a rosy mist of optimism clouding his eyes.

2

The events of the months which followed Blamey's appointment to command the A.I.F. gave him a certain sardonic satisfaction. He did not gloat, but he was human enough to be well pleased that his enemies, not to mention his fairweather friends, had blundered when they said, "Well, Tom Blamey's finished!" From being something of an outcast he was a social lion, especially with young matrons ambitious to see their husbands safely ensconced in soft Army jobs on the home front. Even his home town—Wagga Wagga—acknowledged the local boy's success by calling him home to take the salute at the 1940 Anzac Day parade.

A shadow had lain across his path for years. In 1932 his older son had been killed. His first wife, after years of invalidism, had died in 1935. His career had fallen to ruins a year later. Then, as luck will change capriciously for a poker player, luck had changed for Blamey. In the April before the outbreak of war he had married again. His second wife, who had been Olga Farnsworth, a Melbourne fashion artist, was many years his junior, but she understood the self-contained man whom many of his acquaintances considered to be merely a ruthless self-seeker. She knew his nature had a side which few men saw—that of the man who loved horses, birds, and all dumb creatures, of the man with a woman's tenderness for flowers.

Blamey was kinder perhaps to animals than ever he was to human beings, with a few exceptions. One evening, while he was still in Melbourne supervising the opening stages of the A.I.F.'s departure for the Middle East, he was riding at Fishermen's Bend with Lieutenant (later Lieut.-Col.) John Wilmoth, one of his early *aides-de-camp*.

Blamey noticed a glint of white in the grass. He and Wilmoth dismounted and found a pair of bleating kids, perhaps a week old, obviously abandoned by their mother. At that time a few human derelicts lived on the Fishermen's Bend area in squalid humpies, which provided some kind of shelter. A primitive dwelling of the kind stood within a few hundred yards, and Blamey and Wilmoth rode across to it. In response to their calls, a man who looked as if he had been on a fortnight's bender put his head out of the humpy and asked what they wanted. Blamey told him about the kids and said,

"Will you look after them for me? I'll have them picked up tomorrow."

"No," growled the humpy dweller, unimpressed by Blamey's badges of rank. "I'm not interested."

"I'll pay you for it," Blamey promised.

"I couldn't be bothered," the man said, and dropped the hessian sack that curtained his doorway.

Back in the city, Blamey arranged to deliver the kids to an animal welfare home next day.

"We'll go over first thing in the morning and get them," he told Wilmoth.

Wilmoth thought no more about it until his telephone rang later that night. It was Blamey calling.

"About those goats," he said. "I was worried, so my wife and I drove over there and picked them up."

He and Lady Blamey had driven to Fishermen's Bend and found the stranded kids as dusk was falling. Blamey himself took a hand at feeding them from an infant's bottle in the kitchen of his flat.

Everybody close to Blamey was aware of his soft spot for dumb creatures. An officer who could make no headway in the Army complained that he was another victim of Blamey's malice: Blamey, he told anyone who would listen, had him "set," so he could hope for nothing. The charge was true. Blamey had learned that the officer had a trick of over-riding horses.

When war broke out Blamey was reasonably fit for a man of his years. He was always fond of the table, and his once-compact figure had run somewhat to flesh; but by medical standards he was an impressive physical specimen for a man of fifty-five. He had never known a serious illness. He did not so much not fear illness as refuse to admit that it existed. If you had a temperature, or a pain in the stomach, the back, or the head, you ignored it; you carried on with your work, and, in due time, the temperature or the pain disappeared. It was a kind of primitive Christian Science.

One of the most excruciating pains known to man is that caused by a kidney stone. Blamey was visiting Puckapunyal camp to watch a tactical exercise. He had had some pain in the lumbar regions the day before. While the exercise was in progress, he sat in his car with set lips and his back pressed hard against the cushions.

"What's wrong with the Old Man?" Lieutenant-Colonel Lloyd asked Colonel Burston.

"Well," Burston said, "most other men I know would be in hospital at the moment. He's passing a kidney stone. It's half-way between his kidneys and his bladder. It must be hell!"

Blamey was at his desk at headquarters at his usual early hour next morning.

"Well, I passed it," he said, with a satisfied air.

He produced the stone for Burston's inspection. It was large and jagged, and Burston knew he must have suffered the worst kind of agony as it tore its way down through his body.

Later, in Palestine, Blamey came to a midday meal looking very ill. After lunch he said to Burston, "What about coming for a ride this afternoon?" It was one of the maddest rides in Burston's memory. Except for one or two breathers, when they walked the horses, they went at hunting pace for about fifteen miles over the rough country around Gaza, clearing wadis, cactus hedges, and anything else in their way. Burston did not see Blamey again until some hours after dinner.

"I don't know what was the matter with you at lunchtime, sir," he said then, "but you're obviously much better now."

"One of those rotten stones was passing down and giving me hell," Blamey said. "I knew if I mentioned it to you you'd want to put me to bed. I thought the best thing to do was go for a ride and shake the thing down."

Burston had to agree that wild riding, though not a treatment prescribed in any medical textbook for the removal of a kidney stone, had worked in Blamey's case, however agonisingly.

This refusal to surrender to physical pain was an article of faith with Blamey. One of his favourite books was Kenneth Roberts' *North-West Passage*. He esteemed it less as a literary *tour de force* than because the central character endured fantastic physical hardships without flinching. Blamey's admiration for physical hardihood often found practical expression. He had to decide the fate of a man who had gone to the Middle East as an infantry reinforcement—and was then found to have an artificial foot.

"What are we going to do about this fellow?" he asked the officer who took the papers to him.

"Well, sir," said the officer, "if a man's got enough guts and ingenuity to get himself overseas with a wooden foot, I don't think he ought to be sent home."

"Neither do I," said Blamey.

The wooden-footed soldier stayed, as a clerk in a non-operational unit.

Blamey suffered torture with gout on and off throughout the war. On a visit from Palestine to Cairo in 1940 he was bidden to dinner with General Wavell, then Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. He had a bad attack of gout in the right foot; it was the hue of a ripe

tomato and swollen to a point where the skin seemed ready to burst. Major (later Lieutenant-Colonel) Norman Carlyon, Blamey's personal assistant, urged him to excuse himself from the dinner engagement. Blamey grunted, "We'll see about that!"

As the time to leave drew near he dressed himself, leaving only his right foot unshod. First, he tried with no success to ease a zip-fastened slipper on to the swollen foot. Then he took a leather shoe, opened it up, and tore the leather a little below the laces. He pressed his foot into the shoe as far as it would go, then stood up, raised his foot and stamped it on to the floor with all his weight. He staggered back against the wall, streaming with sweat and wincing with pain. But the swollen foot was shod, and he braced himself and walked out of the hotel to his car, hardly limping.

Blamey was in wonderful heart throughout the dinner, chatting with Wavell and with Wavell's guests as if his body and mind were completely at ease. When he and Carlyon got back to the hotel that night, he collapsed. Only then did Carlyon realise that Blamey had been in acute pain for every second of the evening.

Blamey had almost super-human command of himself in times of physical stress. Late in the war a young A.I.F. officer, Captain William H. Williams, was on duty at a military funeral at Cairns. It was an overpoweringly hot and humid Queensland day, and the service was long. Several infantrymen, trained to the pink of physical fitness, collapsed, but Blamey, thirty years older than most of them, stood at rigid attention all through the service, not flickering a muscle. Two years later Blamey and Williams met, as civilians. Williams mentioned the funeral, and asked Blamey how he had contrived to show no distress while younger men had crumpled.

"Well," said Blamey, smiling, "after all, I was much older than they were, and therefore I ought to have had more control of my body."

It was one of Blamey's misfortunes that most of the gossip Australians heard about him and his doings was to his discredit. Of course, being a man, he had his moments as Dr. Jekyll, and his other moments as Mr. Hyde. Both his Jekyll and his Hyde were larger than lifesize, because Blamey himself was larger than lifesize. Unluckily for himself, he had no talent for humbug. He did what he did and made no attempt to pretend himself more virtuous than he was. The public could take him or leave him. It was a case of "The public be damned!"

It was impossible to be negative about him. Men who knew him fell into three categories. Some admired him absolutely, and would hear no ill of him. Some admired, and liked him, in spite of the

flaws they recognised. Some detested him and would hear no good of him. In a curious way, each of these views of Blamey had a certain merit. Men who did not know him, including hundreds of thousands of his fellow-Australians who never set eyes on him, were his most tireless detractors. They accepted the ugly legends which clustered about his name, and convicted him without trial of nearly every form of malfeasance from nepotism to corruption, and of nearly every other sin in the calendar, as well.

Nobody, least of all Blamey, pretended that he was a man of saintly character. He was endowed with the appetites, the hopes, the greeds, the ambitions common to men, but he was far above most other men in his power of intelligence and in that more elusive quality, intellect. He could relax with a trivial novel; but the scope of his serious reading was immense, not only on military subjects, but in the realm of such abstruse matters as evolutionary genetics.

More than once in New Guinea he startled Australian troops, who knew his reputation as a *bon viveur*, but not his cultural accomplishments, by examining fossils scooped from the bed of a stream and delivering an extempore lecture on their age and origin. He could discuss such matters as geology, botany and zoology with men who had devoted their lives to a study of these subjects and acquit himself with honour.

When he was appointed to command the A.I.F., a well-meaning, but misguided, journalist tried to popularise him with the public by portraying him as bluff Tom Blamey, one of the boys, who would gladly exchange gossip over a pot of beer with any of his own privates. It was a complete misrepresentation. The mature Blamey was never one of the boys, and he would have been the first to damn such a conception of himself. He was what he was, and he made no apology for it, either to those above him or those below him in authority.

John Curtin, the Labour Prime Minister whose Government was to appoint Blamey Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Military Forces after Japan entered the war, said what is probably the last word on this controversial, brilliant, and contradictory man.

Some of Curtin's influential supporters, urging him to dismiss Blamey, cited tales of Blamey's personal frailties. Curtin heard them out with patience. Then:

"Gentlemen," he said, "I want a commander of the Australian Army, not a Sunday school superintendent."

3

Blamey reached Palestine by air on June 20, 1940. He had been appointed G.O.C. of 1st Australian Corps in April. This post had

been created when the Government decided to raise a second division, the 7th, for service overseas. The greater part of the 6th Division under Major-General (later Lieutenant-General Sir) Iven Mackay, was already assembled in Palestine. The 7th Division was still in Australia, and Blamey's headquarters existed only in skeletal form.

Blamey flew to the Middle East, accompanied by his chief of staff, Brigadier Rowell (later Lieutenant-General Sir Sydney Rowell, Chief of the General Staff), Burston, Wilmoth, a confidential clerk and four batmen. The party travelled in civilian clothing. Blamey and Rowell were listed as company directors, Burston as a doctor, Wilmoth as a secretary, the rest as clerks. The Qantas flying-boat which carried them was circling to land at Sourabaya, when a radio message was handed to Blamey. It asked if General Blamey was on board. He shrugged, and sent back an affirmative answer. A few minutes later, clad in a yellowish sports shirt and grey slacks, he was inspecting a guard of honour of Netherlands East Indies soldiers uniformed in immaculate white. Thereafter the party had grave doubts of the effectiveness, or the necessity, of the measures designed to ensure the secrecy of their journey.

Plenty of worries awaited Blamey in Palestine. The A.I.F. might have to go into action at any time, lacking practically every item of equipment, except rifles, required to fight a battle.

Blamey sent his G.S.O. II (Intelligence), Lieutenant-Colonel (later Brigadier) Ronald Irving, to Australia to force an awareness of the A.I.F.'s needs on the Military Board. Irving flew back to report to Blamey after three weeks in Australia. He landed on the Sea of Galilee, and drove to Jerusalem, intending to allow himself one night of relaxation. But he had hardly straightened his tie when he was told, "The Old Man wants your report tomorrow." The weary Irving sat up all night to have the report ready. He was more or less prostrate with exhaustion for a week afterwards; but he knew that when Blamey wanted something by a certain time he did not expect to be kept waiting a single minute.

Irving, a regular officer, shared with most officers of Corps Headquarters a deep awe of Blamey. Rowell, who would fight Blamey on any issue where he felt a bad decision touched the welfare of the A.I.F., was a noteworthy exception. But most of Blamey's officers found him gruff, demanding, thoroughly formidable. When they knew him better, they learned that, once an officer had won his trust, Blamey would support him through hell and high water. He expected loyalty from his staff, and he gave loyalty in return. His philosophy was that of Monash, his old chief: "I don't care a damn for your

loyalty when you think I'm right: the time I want it is when you think I'm wrong."

He rarely praised a man to his face; his approval was expressed by the giving of his trust. In this he was unchanged from the first war. Just after the 1918 Armistice, when most men's nerves were on edge, Blamey snapped at R. G. Casey over some trivial error.

"Well, sir," retorted Casey, "you're not satisfied with me, and I don't particularly want to stay here. Will you let me go back?"

Blamey replied: "Look lad, when I'm dissatisfied with you, I'll tell you so in terms you will understand. It may interest you to know I'm not at all dissatisfied with you."

It was ever so with Blamey. The expression of his approval was negative, of his disapproval positive. If a conscientious officer made a mistake in good faith, Blamey, whatever he might say to the defaulter in private, would permit nobody else, whether Cabinet Minister or general, to criticise him.

He did not give his trust readily; but when he did give it, he gave it absolutely. Burston, his medical chief, a tall, scholarly South Australian, was an officer on whose honesty and calm judgment Blamey quickly came to rely. The reddish-haired Burston was a first war veteran, but he had known Blamey only at a distance until the Second A.I.F. was raised for overseas service, late in 1939. In fact, it was many months after the A.I.F. reached Palestine before Burston was sure of his standing with Blamey. Then one day he had to lay before Blamey details of two complex medical projects. Blamey glanced casually at the papers and initialled each set without asking a question. Burston expressed surprise at this ready acceptance of proposals of some magnitude.

"How long have you been serving with me now, Ginger?" Blamey asked.

Burston told him.

"Well, surely," said Blamey, "you have formed a better estimate of me than that. You are my technical adviser on medical problems. You don't think I'd be stupid enough to join issue with you on your own ground, do you? I must assume before you come to me with things like these that you have given them every thought. . . . But, mind you, don't you let me down! If you do, you'll know about it!"

The faith Blamey had in Burston was to play a big part in some of the controversial episodes of the A.I.F.'s history.

4

Blamey did not interest himself deeply in the training of his Palestine forces for battle. He regarded training as a responsibility

which could well be left to divisional, brigade, and battalion commanders. He preached physical fitness to his officers, and expected them to enforce it on their men. He left nobody in doubt of the standard he required, or of the penalty awaiting any officer who failed him.

"I've got a trunkful of bowler hats," he told more than one audience of officers, "and any of you who lets me down will find himself back in Australia wearing one."

Men might not like everything Blamey said, but at least they understood what he meant when he said it.

It was one of Blamey's human weaknesses that he did not always take the medicine he prescribed for subordinates. Perhaps he felt that at fifty-six he had earned the right to physical, though certainly not mental, relaxation. He worked at full bore from the time his batman woke him with a cup of tea at six in the morning until five or six in the evening, often much later. Nothing of the administrative detail of his post escaped him. He was tireless, and he expected his personal staff to be tireless also. But in the early months in Palestine his bodily fitness was rather below the level required of a man commanding a military force in a theatre of war. He liked the rich food and good wine he found in the European-style cafes Jewish refugees had set up in such cities as Haifa, Tel-Aviv, and Jerusalem.

He was able, by drawing on his reserves of bull-like energy, to outwork men twenty years his junior; but senior members of his headquarters staff felt his health would inevitably crack unless he lived more austerely. He began to suffer with leg ulcerations, originating in too much good living and too little exercise. Inevitably, he became less active. His appearances in places where his officers and men could see him were for a time disturbingly infrequent. At last Burston plucked up courage and, with some trepidation, bearded Blamey on the subject.

"Look," Burston said, "I'm not a soldier, but I'm a doctor, and I've had thirty or forty years' experience. If you disregard my advice, you are going to be back in Australia within six months."

Burston was genuinely concerned. He told Rowell of his talk with Blamey. He had hardly left Rowell's office when another caller appeared. This time it was an Australian officer freshly returned from Egypt, whither the 6th Division had been transferred from Palestine for further training.

"Brigadier," said Rowell's visitor, "the 6th Division is asking if the Old Man has gone back to Australia, as it is so long since they have seen him."

The implication of this remark, coming on the heels of Burston's

words and Rowell's own observations, was disquieting. Rowell chewed the problem over until after the midday meal. Then he went to see Blamey in the small house they shared in Gaza town. He asked for permission to speak frankly. Blamey grunted assent. Rowell, whose post as Blamey's chief staff officer gave him a licence to speak with a candour no other Australian officer would have dared to use, then told the Old Man that he was "letting the side down." Rowell bluntly said that, if he were not prepared to accept medical advice and make himself fit, he should throw in his hand and go back to Australia.

Rowell's words struck home. The 2nd Australian General Hospital detailed a nursing sister and a masseuse to give Blamey special treatment. Blamey also disciplined himself. He sought the pleasures of the table more sparingly, and embarked upon a programme of regular physical exercise, rarely failing to cover eight to fifteen miles on horseback every day. By the time the A.I.F. went to Greece in the spring of 1941 he was as fit as a man of his age could hope to be. Naturally, he was influenced by the knowledge that he could not afford to juggle with his post. Too many men were waiting to step into his shoes. This was something else on which Blamey had no illusions.

He knew that men, whether professional soldiers, or civilians who have become soldiers for the duration of a conflict, do not shed their human ambitions because a war is in progress. On the contrary, the natural desire to lead of the man with an instinct for leadership appears to be sharpened in wartime; he does not sublimate it in a fervour of patriotic zeal. Blamey, ambitious himself, was able to recognise the same ambition in other men. He knew from the day of his appointment as G.O.C. of the 6th Division that the long knives were out for him, but he did not fear them.

"You have to make up your mind, sir, whether the time has come to conciliate or exterminate," one of his friends told him in Palestine. Blamey answered with a shake of the head and a slow smile. He was satisfied he could hold his post without resorting either to humbug or assassination.

No man could have been more active than Blamey was throughout the summer, autumn, and winter while the three A.I.F. divisions, the 6th, 7th, and 9th, were being gathered in the Middle East. It was no rare thing for him to travel by car, in a single week, from Gaza to Cairo, down the desert road to Alexandria, and back to Gaza, perhaps with a detour through Jerusalem, seeing to Army business at a dozen different points *en route*.

He had the insatiable curiosity of the Elephant's Child. If it was humanly possible to do so, he would always travel to and from any point he had to visit by different routes. Even on a half-mile journey

in a city he would direct his driver to go by one way and return by another. He always hoped to find something new round the next corner. Whether it was a primitive glass-blowing works in the Hebron hills, a Jewish potter's kiln in the Old City of Jerusalem, or a wayside carpet-weaver's shop beyond Nablus, he found his way to places whose existence was unguessed by one in ten thousand Australian soldiers in Palestine.

Often when out riding he would rein in his horse, dismount, pick two or three tiny wildflowers, and stow these in a matchbox. If some local expert could not tell him all about them he would airmail his specimens to Australia to be examined and classified. He bought a pile of books about Palestine's history and customs as soon as he arrived, and studied these in spare moments. He worked at Arabic by night, and by day tested what he had learned, until he had a working knowledge of the language.

He asked the Palestine Administration's Director of Land and Survey, James N. Stubbs, an Australian soldier of the first war, to come to Gaza and explain to him the system of Arab land tenure. After three-quarters of an hour Stubbs came out of Blamey's office mopping his brow.

"God Almighty, what a man!" he exclaimed. "I feel I've been sucked dry."

His interest in every detail touching the A.I.F.'s welfare was unsparing. He worked devotedly in the months before the A.I.F. went into action to establish a foolproof system of amenities. It was a model of what an army amenities system should be, but rarely is.

In the first war the Australians had depended on the British canteens service, in which Blamey had found many faults. He also remembered that the British canteens had amassed huge profits, which benefited their Australian customers not at all. He was determined that the A.I.F. should have a canteens service of its own, as an integral part of the Army. To Blamey, the Australian Army Canteens Service was as important as any unit in the A.I.F. Many an officer or man who had gone overseas because he wanted to fight found himself plucked out of his line unit and transferred to the Canteens Service on Blamey's order. The preference of the individual did not count; the efficiency of the Canteens Service was the overriding factor.

In 1941, Captain (later Lieutenant-Colonel) E. W. Hayward, an Adelaide business man in peace time, was called out of besieged Tobruk where he was serving with the 2/43 Battalion to see Blamey in Cairo. Blamey told him he was to become second in command of A.A.C.S., with the rank of major.

"How do you like the idea?" Blamey asked. He had obviously noticed Hayward's crestfallen expression.

"I don't suppose I have much option, sir," Hayward replied.

"No," said Blamey drily, "you haven't, have you?"

Blamey's conception was that a canteens service should not operate only in comparatively safe back areas, but should go into battle with the troops. He selected its officers, where possible such men as Hayward, with this idea in the forefront of his mind.

Blamey never forgot the cardinal importance of keeping his soldiers interested, as well as busy. For example, it was on his initiative, when the A.I.F. had to garrison Syria in 1941, that a school to train ski troops was established in the Lebanon. The plan had practical military value, because the ski troops were trained to operate as mountain patrols. But its chief purpose, which it admirably fulfilled, was recreational. Australians are not conspicuously happy as garrison troops, and Blamey caused the ski school to be founded as one means of breaking the monotony. The Old Man himself had been an ardent, if not notably adept, skier between the wars. He knew the value of the sport, whether for physical exercise or mental relaxation.

He knew that those "long periods of extreme boredom" that every soldier is familiar with are the deadly enemy of military efficiency, and he would cheerfully order the spending of substantial sums of public money to provide the means of easing the daily lot of men isolated in an unsympathetic environment. In the 1941 summer he called at the A.I.F. Base Ordnance Depot, at Tel el Kebir. While he was being conducted over the vast depot, in harsh and thirsty country on the banks of the Ismailia Canal, he asked Lieutenant-Colonel (later Brigadier) Howard Kingham, Chief Ordnance Officer, "Anything you want?"

"Yes," said Kingham. "A brass band."

Kingham was only half-serious, though the need to find entertainment for the thousand or so men in the depot, which was fifty-odd miles from Cairo, the nearest leave city, was real enough.

"Get Kingham a brass band," Blamey said, over his shoulder, to Norman Carlyon.

Carlyon telephoned Kingham from Cairo next day.

"I've been looking round," he said, "and I can't get you a brass band, only a silver band. Will that do?"

Kingham, who did not pretend to understand the esoteric differences between a silver and a brass band, at once sent Sergeant (later Warrant-Officer I) Charles Franz to Cairo to select the instruments. Franz, a New South Wales soldier, was an experienced bandsman, who had been playing in, coaching, and judging Australian bands

for many years. He returned to Tel el Kebir with twenty-four instruments, which had cost £600.

The investment paid handsome dividends. The band raised at Tel el Kebir was an invaluable source of entertainment to the officers and men of the Base Ordnance Depot. Later it took part in an A.I.F. march through Cairo—the only Australian military band in the second war to play itself through Cairo. The band was still intact when the bulk of the A.I.F. returned to Australia in 1942 to fight the Pacific war. It continued making martial music until the war ended.

He was determined not only that the A.I.F. should be an *élite* force, but also that the record of its achievements should be adequately preserved for posterity. Something of an art connoisseur himself, he pressed that the pick of Australia's artists should be commissioned to work as official war artists. His close friend Harold Herbert, the distinguished water colourist, was an early choice.

"Now then," Herbert said, when he reported to Blamey in Gaza, "let's get this straight at the start! Do I call you Sir, General, or Tom?"

Blamey glared. "All you need to remember," he rasped, "is that I am the G.O.C., and you'll pay me the respect my rank deserves."

For once, if not for long, the usually irrepressible Herbert was deflated.

Ivor Hele, one of Australia's finest portraitists, who arrived in Palestine as a private in the 2/48 Battalion, was ordered to report to Blamey one day.

"You're Hele?" Blamey greeted him. "All right, I want you to be an official war artist."

Within an hour Hele was transformed into a lieutenant, with a fifteen hundredweight truck, a blank cheque to buy materials, and an order to go to the Western Desert and paint. He later painted a portrait of Blamey in Cairo, which hangs in the Australian War Museum, Canberra. It was summer, and Hele worked shirtless, in slippers and shorts—the only Australian soldier ever to appear on duty before Blamey in such unregimental dress.

Blamey was at home in Palestine for a special reason: he liked the company of Jewish people. He was not, like so many Gentiles, merely tolerant of the race; his liking was active. He admired both their culture and their fortitude in the face of centuries-long persecution. No doubt some of this feeling was born of his regard for John Monash's wide scholarship and great intellectual qualities.

He was a frequent guest in the homes of many of the most distinguished Jewish intellectuals in Palestine. Captain (later Major) Sydney Crawcour, a Melbourne Jewish doctor, whose prewar

acquaintanceship with Blamey ripened into a fast friendship in the war, was stationed in Jerusalem in 1940. It was through Crawcour that Blamey met many of the Jewish intelligentsia.

The Jerusalem home of Samuel Horowitz, leader of the Palestine bar, became one of his favourite places of call. Professor Abraham H. Fraenkel, an able physicist, was another friend Blamey made in Jerusalem. He and Crawcour dined with the Fraenkels during the Festival of the Giving of the Law, and Blamey astounded the company by revealing a familiarity with the complex ritual and its symbolism which few orthodox Jews could have surpassed.

He sometimes astonished Christians in a like manner. While inspecting the A.I.F. detention barracks in Jerusalem, he noticed a young Australian who had repeatedly served terms there for infractions of military discipline.

"Did you ever hear about kicking against the pricks?" Blamey asked.

The prisoner looked blank.

"The Acts, Chapter 9, Verse 5," Blamey said. Then, without faltering, he quoted the passage.

The prisoner looked blanker than ever to hear these words from the lips of the general, who, so everybody said, was a bit of a do-er himself.

Blamey was afflicted with no sentimentality about military wrongdoers, but he had an instinctive preference for justice, rather than the strict letter of the law. Late in December, 1940, the 18th Brigade, which had earlier been diverted to the United Kingdom, arrived in the Middle East. Four men were at once lodged in the Jerusalem detention barracks charged with acts of indiscipline they had committed on the journey. Captain (later Lieutenant-Colonel) J. A. Courtney, the hard-shelled commandant of the detention barracks, became interested in their cases. He felt their misdemeanours were not grave enough to warrant protracted imprisonment without trial, and he began pestering Gaza to accelerate the processes of military law. But weeks dragged by and nothing happened.

One night Blamey, who was staying at the Jerusalem mess for the evening, asked, "How are things, Courtney?" Courtney told him the story of the four prisoners. Growing excited, he stood up, walked across the room, and stood above Blamey.

"This smacks of Nazism, sir," he said, "the very thing we are fighting. Four men held without trial for eleven weeks!" He looked down then. Blamey's usually pale eyes were black, nearly all pupil. Courtney stopped dead, thinking, "I've done it! A captain can't talk

to a general like that." He edged away and made himself inconspicuous for the rest of the evening.

When Blamey was leaving next morning, a group of officers assembled to see him off. Blamey halted in front of Courtney.

"Well, about those men . . . " He repeated their names, which Courtney had mentioned only once the night before, at the beginning of his harangue. "What do you think should be done?"

Courtney suggested a summary of evidence should be taken at once.

"Right," said Blamey.

A truck from Gaza picked up the four men at the detention barracks at eight o'clock next morning. An inquiry opened in Gaza at half-past two that afternoon, and by nightfall each of the four had been released to his unit. One of them died later when he went out under heavy shellfire to try to save the life of his wounded battery commander. The others all won good records in fighting units.

It was a demonstration of Blamey's talent for seeing that real justice was done.

5

When the 6th Division attacked Bardia in the early morning of January 3, 1941, Blamey was at Gaza. It was no fault of his that he was unable to play a direct part in the Second A.I.F.'s baptism as a fighting force.

Wavell needed the 6th Division to press the Western Desert offensive, and Blamey had agreed some months earlier to its transfer to Egypt and its temporary detachment from his direct command. He had done so, he pointed out to Wavell in a letter dated October 4, 1940, "only on the assurance that it would be complete in equipment at an early date." He protested in this letter that the assurance had not been put into effect, and observed: "I am in a very serious quandary because I feel that the Australian Government will hold me culpable for not informing them in detail of the position, which, on the other hand, it might cause a serious upset at this moment if I do."

These were strong words from the commander of a subordinate force to the Commander-in-Chief, but they were mild in comparison with language Blamey was to use in clashes of will between himself and other British senior commanders under whom sections of the A.I.F. operated later.

Wavell's reply was, not surprisingly, somewhat sharp. In the course of his letter he said: "I quite agree that it is most desirable that troops should be fully equipped and fully trained before meeting the enemy. As far as is possible I am doing my best to see that this is so. . . . The battle that may be fought in the near future for the

defence of Egypt may be one of the most important and momentous of the whole war, and I am sure that the Australians would not wish to be held back from it because their equipment was not entirely complete. I do not regard the Italians as a first-class enemy."

This was by no means the last, or most spirited, collision to occur between Blamey and Wavell. They were both men of strong determination, and their disagreements would have been more frequent and painful had either respected the other less than he did. R. G. Casey, British Minister of State in the Middle East in 1942-43, became a close friend of Wavell, then Viceroy of India. He asked Wavell his estimate of Blamey.

"Probably the best soldier we had in the Middle East," Wavell said. "Not an easy man to deal with, but a very satisfactory man to deal with. His military knowledge was unexampled, and he was positive, firm, and a very satisfactory commander."

From Wavell, who was not given to showering praise, that was a high tribute.

On his side Blamey had a deep and abiding admiration for Wavell's qualities. Even while he fought Wavell on the issue of the A.I.F.'s equipment and employment he sang the praises of the resolute man who, in Blamey's words, "never faltered in his task of building bricks without straw."

In the middle of the desert campaign Blamey found himself engaged in a rather grotesque dispute with his own Government. After long urging by Blamey in a series of letters, the Government had granted Lady Blamey permission to join her husband, though Palestine and Egypt had been closed to the womenfolk of A.I.F. officers and men by a Government decision taken in May, 1940. In fact, Lady Blamey had since March, 1940, held a passport permitting her to leave Australia, though it required a special visa before she might enter the Palestine-Egypt area.

She left Australia without any flourish of trumpets. But while the flying-boat was passing through Brisbane she was recognised by a Sydney *Daily Telegraph* reporter. He sent a story to his newspaper, in which he attributed to Lady Blamey a statement, "I am going because I am lonely, and I think Tom feels that way, too. I have kept my trip quiet, though my husband knows I am going." Lady Blamey later categorically denied that she had said anything of the kind. "It is the last thing I would have said," she insisted. "I knew the wife of every Australian who was serving abroad was lonely."

By the time Lady Blamey reached Palestine in the middle of January she was the central figure of a violent political storm. On January 23 Menzies telegraphed Blamey that the Government's

decision permitting Lady Blamey to go to the Middle East had "occasioned much adverse criticism in Australia." Menzies asked that Lady Blamey should return "at a reasonably early date." Blamey replied that his wife had already taken an appointment as a Red Cross hospital visitor. The Government insisted that she must go home at once.

Messages flashed back and forth between Palestine and Australia until, on February 14, Blamey bluntly told the Government that his wife had "decided to take the matter out of my hands." She was, he said, "not prepared to submit to the humiliation of returning under orders." The Government, unmoved, repeated its demand. So on February 21 Blamey told them that future communications on the subject should be addressed to a firm of Cairo solicitors representing his wife.

"If the Government wants my wife back, they'll have to send another expeditionary force to get her," he remarked at the time.

The Government must have realised that this was so, and they let the matter drop.

There was a touch of irony about the Government's insistence that Lady Blamey should return to Australia, since the wives of a number of British senior officers, including Generals Wavell and O'Connor, were in the Middle East. They played a noteworthy part in helping their husbands with the unavoidable social obligations of their posts. And a few Australian women, some with husbands in the A.I.F., who had arrived earlier in the Middle East and taken up Red Cross duties, or other amenities work, were left undisturbed while the extraordinary dispute raged about Lady Blamey.

Of course, the general run of the A.I.F. knew nothing of the disagreements that Blamey was having with Wavell and the Australian Government. What they did know was that, as represented by the 6th Division in the Western Desert, they had made an impressive *début* as fighting troops.

The desert operations were fought under the command of General (later Sir) Richard O'Connor, a British regular soldier of high ability. Wavell had agreed that command of the Western Desert forces should pass early in February to the Australian Corps. Thus, Blamey was to have achieved a fighting command and the direction of an offensive, when this became practicable, into the Italian strongholds in Tripolitania. Wavell telegraphed him early in February that the arrangement would have to be altered. Wavell said he had sanctioned certain plans put forward by O'Connor for action in Cyrenaica which was likely to continue for two or three weeks. Wavell added: "Do not feel it advisable, or fair on you, to make change in middle

of operations planned by O'Connor." Blamey telegraphed Wavell: "Protest most strongly against change of plan . . . Nothing unanticipated has developed requiring alteration of the plan, and I request that plan now be adhered to. Have consulted Prime Minister, who concurs completely with this view." Menzies had just arrived in the Middle East, and was with Blamey at Gaza when Wavell's message was delivered and Blamey's answer was framed. Wavell, no doubt fearing from the tone of Blamey's reply that the dispute would turn into an acrimonious quarrel, ordered Australian Corps Headquarters into the desert, as originally agreed.

In fact, the tension would never have developed if a telegram from Rowell, who had gone to Egypt in advance of Blamey, had not been delayed in its journey to Gaza. Rowell, on a call at G.H.Q., Middle East, had learned that it was most unlikely that there would be any pause in the advance to Benghazi to permit a complicated programme of reliefs to be put into effect. He had then told G.H.Q. that, while the Australians would not wish to intrude upon General O'Connor's highly successful operation, they would not be happy to be marooned in Cyrenaica as a garrison force after Benghazi had fallen. However, Rowell's telegram to Blamey on the subject did not reach Gaza until well after the delivery of Wavell's message. When Blamey and Rowell did meet in the desert, Blamey said that he would never have insisted upon making the relief if the delayed telegram had been in his hands before he sent his somewhat challenging message to Wavell.

Blamey flew from Cairo to the desert on February 3. His headquarters was already moving westward through the desert in the wake of the victorious offensive. The Italian Army had been shattered. The remnants of it had gone stumbling back into Tripolitania. The task ahead was clear. First, Blamey's British and Australian desert forces must be refitted. Then the offensive must be resumed, the enemy smashed in Tripolitania, and North Africa freed of Axis troops.

Blamey drove out from his headquarters at El Abiar early on the morning of February 15. Colonel (later Brigadier) B. J. Andrew, his Deputy Adjutant-General, and Norman Carlyon were with him. They went as far west as Agedabia, about ninety miles beyond Benghazi, near the eastern shore of the Gulf of Sirte. There they got out of the car, and Blamey's eyes swept the horizon.

"There's nothing in front of us for miles here," he said.

Like an omen, a single enemy plane came out of the west almost before the sentence was finished and diving, blitzed the road. Blamey, Andrew, Carlyon, and the driver went to ground in a wayside ditch.

Blamey had no means of knowing then that the first units of the German Afrika Korps had disembarked in Tripoli Harbour the day before, or that a German general named Rommel had been in North Africa for three days. British Army Intelligence services were also unaware of these disquieting facts. Another factor of which Blamey was ignorant was also developing. Britain's decision to go to the aid of Greece was in the making. Greece had been fighting the Italians since October 28, 1940—the only nation outside the British Commonwealth to be at war with the Axis powers at this time. The Greeks had proved to be more than a match for Mussolini's dubious legions; but a German attack from Bulgaria in the spring now seemed inevitable, and this the Greek forces could not hope to stop without powerful external aid.

On the day after his trip to Agedabia Blamey lunched in Barce with General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson (later Field-Marshal Lord Wilson), Military Governor of Cyrenaica. It was a cheerful lunch. British arms had won their first land victory of the second war. Blamey was not militarily naive enough to believe the tide had turned: but the future was at least less bleak. Wilson gave Blamey a message from Wavell. It was an instruction to him to report in Cairo. Wilson could not tell Blamey the reason of the summons.

Blamey, Rowell, and Carlyon drove to Barce airfield next morning. O'Connor, the commander Blamey had relieved in the desert, was waiting on the airfield. He was bound for Cairo and a few weeks' leave. Blamey did not know what awaited him in Cairo when he took the air in a Percival Gull communication plane soon after noon. But he was not to be in doubt for long.

"Can't you tell the Australian Government about this?" Carlyon asked.

"It isn't my prerogative to offer appreciations or expressions of opinion to the Government," Blamey said. "I speak when I'm asked."

Carlyon, a civilian in uniform only for the duration of the war, was less sensitive to such inhibitions than was Blamey, essentially the professional soldier. Two days after their talk at the Gezira flat they were driving to Alexandria. Carlyon, with some trepidation, reopened the question.

"I don't understand why you can't send a cable to Australia asking the Government if they'd like an appreciation," he said.

Blamey said nothing, but he was thoughtful for the rest of the trip. When they reached Alexandria about lunchtime he said abruptly, "I think I ought to do what you suggest."

He then sent a cablegram to P. C. Spender, Minister for the Army (later Sir Percy Spender, Australian Ambassador to the U.S.), asking permission to submit his views on the expedition to Greece "before A.I.F. is committed." Spender assented to the request, in a reply which reached Blamey next day.

The appreciation Blamey cabled to Australia described the forces to be sent, and ominously noted that the Germans had "as many divisions available as the roads could carry." It continued: "It is certain that, with three or four divisions, we must be prepared to meet overwhelming forces completely equipped and trained. Greek forces inadequate in numbers and equipment to deal with the first irruptions of the strong German Army. Air Forces available twenty-three* squadrons. German Air Force within close striking range of the proposed theatre of operations, and large air force can be brought to bear early in the summer. In view of the Germans' much-proclaimed intention to drive us off the Continent wherever we appear, landing of this small British force would be most welcome to them, as it gives good reason for attack. The factors to be weighed are: For (a) the effect of failure to reinforce Greece on opinion in Turkey, Yugoslavia, and Greece; and, against (b) the effect of defeat and second evacuation, if such be possible, on opinion and action of the same countries and Japan. . . ."

He had little time left now. He snatched an hour to say farewell to his wife in Cairo, and told her, "I'll probably be away some time."

* Blamey's belief that twenty-three squadrons were intended for Greece was apparently based on an extraordinary misconception. The R.A.F. strength in Greece by early April was only nine squadrons: the R.A.F.'s total strength in the eastern Mediterranean when the expedition to Greece was planned was only twenty-three squadrons!

At four o'clock on the afternoon of March 18 he boarded H.M.S. *Gloucester* at Alexandria. An hour later *Gloucester* weighed anchor, and Blamey was headed for Greece.

2

The days of late March promised a perfect spring. In Athens the days were sunny, if chill, the nights fine and cold. Snow lay on the high peaks of the northern mountains, but in the plains and the valleys wildflowers were showing their faces, and trees were bursting into blossom. It was going to be good fighting weather.

One of Blamey's first calls in Athens was at the Hotel Acropole, where Lieutenant-Colonel (later Lieutenant-General) Henry Wells, who had led the Australian advance-party to Greece, had established offices. Wells had his head down over a mass of work when Blamey stumped in.

"Had you no word of my arrival?" Blamey asked.

"No, sir."

Blamey wished to know when Wells expected a certain A.I.F. battalion to disembark.

"We have a signal saying it's due at noon the day after tomorrow," Wells said.

"Well, they're on the wharf now. Get someone down to meet them."

It was Blamey's first experience of the sluggishness of communications between Greece and Egypt. It was not to be his last. A message notifying Wells of the earlier arrival of the battalion had been sent from Egypt, but transmission frailties delayed its delivery until after the troopships carrying the battalion had tied up at the wharf in the Piraeus. Blamey's fears about the inhuman difficulties of the Greek campaign were already beginning to be fulfilled.

He had a few days to find his bearings. He conferred with General Maitland Wilson, who had been sent to command the British forces in Greece; with General Papagos, the Greek Commander-in-Chief; with Brigadier (later Lieutenant-General Sir) Alexander Galloway, Wilson's chief of staff; with Air Commodore (later Air Marshal Sir) John D'Albiac, Air Officer Commanding; and with other men who were vital links in the chain of command.

He and Rowell drove north, reconnoitring Thermopylae, Lamia, Larissa, Gerania, Kozani, and other areas, whose names were presently to become familiar to the eyes and ears of the world through newspaper and radio descriptions of the Battle of Greece. In the northern mountains Blamey met again an old friend, Lieutenant-General (later Lord) Freyberg, V.C., who was to become New Zealand's Governor-General after the war. Freyberg, like Blamey a

veteran of Gallipoli, was G.O.C. of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force. He and Blamey had in common their problems as commanders of Dominions forces assigned to a British theatre of war.

The tall, rough-hewn Freyberg had a more redoubtable record than Blamey as a frontline soldier, but in the campaign each had to wage against British attempts to fragment the force he commanded, Blamey was the sager and longer-sighted. Now they were on the eve of a campaign in which, for the first time since 1914-18, Australian and New Zealand soldiers were to fight side by side. The Anzac tradition was about to be re-established by the sons of the men who had created it on the Gallipoli Peninsula.

Both Blamey and Freyberg were eager to see an Anzac Corps formed. Blamey, in a letter to General Sturdee in November, 1940, had described a call Freyberg paid on him in Cairo. He told Sturdee that Freyberg "was very desirous of linking the fortunes of the New Zealand Force with our own." Blamey favoured such a welding of the Australians and New Zealanders in the Middle East. It was no mere matter of sentiment. He knew that, united, he and Freyberg could more effectively protect Australian and New Zealand interests.

In fact, the Anzac Corps was to be born again in Greece, but it was to have a fighting life of less than a fortnight. Such an evanescent creation, in the midst of a battle already lost, was not the Anzac Corps of either Blamey's or Freyberg's dreams. They hoped to see the birth in the Middle East of an Anzac Corps, perhaps an Anzac Army. It was an ideal they were to strive for, Blamey in particular, in the months after Greece fell—though their striving was to be in vain.

The days of late March in Greece were no time for the pushing of such projects. Hitler was massing his forces behind the Bulgarian frontier. The modest armies of Maitland Wilson and Papagos, which were being gathered and moved into position, could expect only a week or two's respite before they stood in the path of the blitzkrieg. It was a time for action, not dreams.

And that was why Blamey's actions puzzled Norman Carlyon. He came back to Athens and suddenly acquired an interest, which would have seemed more fitting for a peacetime tourist, in the roads, the towns, and the beaches of the Peloponnese, the southernmost area of the Greek mainland. "The Old Man's gone a bit soft," Carlyon told himself. Still, if the G.O.C. of the Australian Corps wished to spend vital days motoring through the pleasant countryside south of the Corinth Canal, it was not for his personal assistant, a mere major, to suggest that he might be more profitably employed.

Carlyon conceded that the jaunt to the Peloponnese would have

been agreeable enough if a battle had not been hanging over their heads. The Greeks were extravagantly grateful to Britain for having sent troops to their aid. Wherever Blamey's car halted, even in the tiniest village, it was surrounded by men, women, and children, fingering its pennant and shouting, "Zito, Australeer!" When Blamey examined any object as if he liked it, someone would at once step forward and present it to him. At Sparta he and Carlyon were welcomed with civic formality by the Mayor. A handsome oil painting hung on the wall behind Carlyon's chair, and in an undertone he remarked on its beauty to Blamey.

"Don't look round at it, Norman," Blamey whispered, "or they'll give it to you!"

It was true. The great heart of Greece was beating overtime.

But Blamey's antics were baffling. He had predicted speedy disaster in Greece; now he behaved as if he and the A.I.F. were likely to be campaigning in Greece for years. As he and Carlyon cruised along the coast roads, he would order the car to stop, climb out, and stroll along a beach of firm sand, observing, "My word, Burston will be pleased with this for a convalescent depot!" or "What a place for a leave centre!" He made a record, or rather had Carlyon make it for him, on a tourist map issued by an oil company, of his detailed impressions of the beaches he visited. Carlyon did it with a weary feeling that this was just so much labour lost. It was weeks later before he discovered that his thoughts had been unjust to Blamey. Late on the night of April 20 Wavell called at Blamey's headquarters near Levadia to discuss the desperate situation and impending evacuation.

"You've got to get us out of here," Blamey told Wavell, and then he produced the map that Carlyon had marked with so much secret reluctance. He handed it to Wavell and said:

"I think you will find these are the best beaches to evacuate from."

3

Hitler opened his attack on Yugoslavia and Greece on April 6. His first purpose was to knock Yugoslavia out of the war. When he was content that organised resistance in Yugoslavia was crumbling, he turned the weight of the attack against Greece.

This was the blitzkrieg in all its smashing fury—the alliance of tanks, guns, and infantry, of bombers, fighters, and dive-bombers in a single striking force. Blamey was to write later, in a message to the Australian Government: "Our troops should never again be asked to go into action under conditions similar to Greece and Crete."

The reports of the first phase of the attack reached Blamey in his headquarters in the village of Gerania, in the northern mountains. His

thoughts must have been sardonic. One of his first fears was already being justified: the full forces promised by Wavell could not be sent to Greece. The 7th Australian Division and the Polish Brigade were still on the other side of the Mediterranean. They could no longer be spared for Greece. For Rommel had struck in Cyrenaica. The British desert army was fleeing toward Egypt. Its two senior commanders, O'Connor and Lieut.-General (later Sir) Philip Neame, V.C., had been made prisoner. On the day the Germans came through the Monastir Gap in Greece, Rommel was already enveloping the fortress of Tobruk.

A detailed discussion of the fighting in Greece has no part in this narrative. It is enough that, within eleven days of the opening of the campaign Yugoslavia was crushed, and the Greek Army no longer existed as a dependable fighting force. It was not the fault of the Yugoslav and Greek soldiers; they collapsed because neither country was organised for total war. The Greek spirit was steadfast, even when disaster was inevitable; but the military collapse meant that Maitland Wilson's forces had to carry on the battle virtually alone.

Days before the inevitability of defeat became common knowledge among Greek civilians, or even among British, Australian, and New Zealand soldiers in the line, operational direction of the battle passed from Maitland Wilson to Blamey. Wilson, a man whose undoubted diplomatic talents were considered by many observers to exceed his military accomplishments, was required for more or less constant discussions with the King of the Hellenes and the Greek Government. He could not be expected to command in the field also.

The way for Blamey to assume operational control had been prepared by the creation of Anzac Corps, and the linking of the Australian and New Zealand divisions under his general command, on April 12. The details of this change had been settled at a conference at Wilson's headquarters in the northern mountains on the night of April 11. Blamey reached Wilson's headquarters at 6.30 that evening. Wavell, who had flown in from Egypt, was there, and he, Wilson, and Blamey dined together. Then they gathered at one end of the mess for their talk, which lasted about three and a half hours.

Carlyon and Wilson's *aide-de-camp*, Captain (later Lieut.-Colonel) M. Chapman-Walker, sat waiting at the other end of the mess. Chapman-Walker leaned forward and whispered, "I say, Carlyon, your Old Man doesn't think there's any hope of your getting out of here, does he?"

"I beg your pardon," said Carlyon.

Chapman-Walker repeated the question.

TOP: *Elasson, after the blitz*

BELOW: *Forde, Blamey, Curtin*

"Of course he does," said Carlyon, speaking with more confidence than he felt

"There isn't a hope, old boy," Chapman-Walker said.

"I'll bet you a pound he's right," Carlyon challenged.

"Taken," said Chapman-Walker.

Carlyon's path never again crossed Chapman-Walker's to enable him to collect the amount of the bet.

At the time he was less optimistic than he pretended, especially when the conference of generals broke up and Wavell put out his hand and said, "Good luck, Blamey." Blamey shook the proffered hand, saluted, and left. Carlyon suspected from Wavell's tone that the task ahead of Blamey was bristling with menacing difficulties.

However, Carlyon was betting on Blamey's ability to work a miracle. He knew Blamey's frailties, but he also knew his capacity for rising to a challenge. He believed Blamey was about as big a man as you could find—even though he was liable, like many another big man, to make himself appear ridiculous at times.

Such an episode occurred when Blamey installed himself in headquarters at Gerania. He told a junior officer to see that a shower-bath was established in the backyard of the cottage in which he was living. The officer enlisted the help of the Engineers, who put together an ingenious device consisting of an iron tank raised on a gallows, and fitted with a cord to release the water on a man standing below. It was bitterly cold in the mountains. The mere sight of the snow which capped nearby Mount Olympus discouraged any of Blamey's entourage from any wish to test the merits of the shower-bath. They suspected that Blamey had demanded it largely to enable him to demonstrate to himself the fact of his physical hardihood.

A small group of Australians, wrapped in greatcoats and mufflers, yet still shivering in the cutting wind, watched Blamey make his first —and, as it turned out, his last—pilgrimage to the shower-bath. He appeared from the back door of the cottage wearing a red silk dressing-gown, with a towel tucked in about his neck. He shed the dressing-gown, stepped under the tank, and tugged the cord. The whole apparatus collapsed on top of him.

Spluttering with water and fury, he roared:

"Where are those Engineers?"

Not a single Engineer was to be found. Blamey dried himself, slipped back into his dressing-gown, and retired to the cottage with what dignity he could salvage from the unseemly wreckage.

(Blamey must have suspected now and then that the Sappers were waging a private war on him. At Morotai in 1945 he caused them to erect a hot and cold shower for his use. It behaved impeccably for

the first few minutes, while he was lathering his body with soap. Then Clive Steele, his Engineer-in-Chief, who chanced to be nearby, heard cries compounded of rage and anguish issuing from the shower-bath. The hot water had boiled, the cold water had failed, and Blamey was calling for the Sappers' blood).

No man could work beside Blamey, day in, day out, and be unconscious of his little vanities, his human foibles. When the campaign in Greece was nearly ended his headquarters was moving back from Levadia. He ordered Carlyon to dismiss the guard, but lingered on, after everyone else had gone, eating a scratch meal. Greek villagers were roaming all over the area, picking up unconsidered trifles of food and clothing discarded by the departing Australians. Blamey had thrown down his greatcoat, an expensive English coat of which he was inordinately proud, and when he was ready to leave it had disappeared.

"Norman," he asked Carlyon, "where's my coat?"

"It seems to have gone, sir," said Carlyon, unable to think of any more telling reply.

Blamey whipped from his pocket a small French automatic pistol and presented it at the head of a Greek who stood goggling at the scene.

"My coat!" he demanded.

The Greek dropped to his knees and raised his arms on high.

"My coat!" Blamey repeated, brandishing the pistol.

The Greek continued to kneel, quaking, understanding nothing, except that an Australian general with a bristling moustache was threatening his life.

"My coat!" Blamey rasped for the third time.

The Greek villager who did not understand a word of English, and had probably never seen the missing coat anyway, had no need to fear for his life. It was just another example of Blamey's bark being more ferocious than his bite.

"Oh, let him go!" Blamey snapped at last, and, pocketing the pistol, strode over to his car and climbed in. He never saw the lost greatcoat again.

It was not on the evidence of such incidents that Carlyon formed his judgment of Blamey. Blamey could be childish; but he could also be majestic. He could be paltry; but he could also be immense.

The events of the Battle of Greece are never likely to be recorded to the satisfaction of every man who took part in that harsh campaign. There are two schools of opinion about Anzac Corps' direction of the fighting. One school holds that Rowell was the directing genius, the other that Blamey was the master mind. Can such questions ever be

settled beyond doubt? Where does the work of the General Officer Commanding end and that of his chief of staff begin? If a certain order was given, did it originate in the mind of the G.O.C. or in the mind of his chief of staff who wrote it? Monash or Blamey? Blamey or Rowell? No mere spectator could presume to answer such questions.

One point is beyond doubt. It was in Greece that hostility, deeper and more enduring than any arising from normal friction between two men working together under the most severe stress, was generated between Rowell and Blamey. It was to poison their future relationships, and culminate in September, 1942, when Japan was at the gates of Australia, in an explosion which all but ended Rowell's military career.

This was, for Australia, a significant, if comparatively small, item in the cost of the campaign in Greece.

4

Blamey's task as G.O.C. of the Anzac Corps was one no soldier in his senses would have envied.

The battle is always confused for an army in retreat. Man loses touch with man, platoon with platoon, company with company, and so on. Greece was no exception. It was baffling enough for the soldier in the line. It was a hundred times as baffling for Blamey and his staff to keep their fingers on the pulse of the battle when communications were constantly being broken by the Luftwaffe's bombardment, and even the whereabouts of a brigade was often a matter of guesswork.

For communications were bad. Blamey did not hear officially that Yugoslavia had capitulated until two days after the event. However, he learned the news without undue delay, and was able to make dispositions to meet the consequent danger, by listening to the B.B.C. news on a radio receiving set built into a kerosene case. It had been the idea of his Chief Signals Officer, Colonel (later Major-General) Colin Simpson, that he should take this set to Greece. The set proved to be a source of vital information when the pressure was hottest.

Near Pharsala one day Carlyon tuned the set to the B.B.C. news. A suave B.B.C. voice was reading the bulletins from the war-fronts when a formation of Stukas, about fifty strong, appeared over Pharsala. Everybody dived for the slit trenches. The bombs started falling, but above the concussion the suave voice from London continued to flow out of the radio set.

"The situation in Greece has now reached a most serious stage," it purred.

"You're telling us!" said Blamey's voice from the trench in which he crouched.

Blamey, like every soldier who served in Greece, experienced his share of air bombing. Near Larissa some Australian infantrymen went to ground when the Stukas came over. As the bombs started to fall, one of them shouted:

"Cripes, I wish I was back in Athens with old Blamey!"

"Shut up, you bloody mug," one of his mates hissed, in a voice tense with alarm. "He's in the next trench."

Blamey only smiled.

Knowing the Luftwaffe's supremacy Blamey showed an inexplicable streak of stubbornness in insisting upon establishing his headquarters in the village of Elasson when the retreat obliged him to move back from Gerania. He sent Major (later Brigadier) Charles Spry, his G.S.O. III (Operations), to reconnoitre a site, emphasising that his own choice was Elasson. Spry, one of the ablest young officers of the Australian Staff Corps, decided against Elasson. It was a road junction, which the Germans would almost certainly bomb; and to site a corps headquarters there would be to invite the annihilation of a defenceless village. So he selected a site some miles south of Elasson. But Blamey would not listen. He wanted his headquarters in Elasson, and there was no more to be said about it. Both Rowell and Brigadier (later Lieutenant-General) William Bridgeford, the Corps D.A. and Q.M.G., tried to dissuade Blamey from siting the headquarters at Elasson, but without the slightest success.

When the move was made, the Corps offices were established in the village, but officers and men of the headquarters, with two exceptions, went to live under canvas in olive groves about a mile away. The exceptions were Blamey and Carlyon. Carlyon could not understand it. He had no desire to sleep and eat in a ricketty cottage in the middle of a village which would become a target for the Luftwaffe within a few hours of the Australians' arrival there.

"Look, sir," he said to Blamey, "why must we be here while all the others are in the olive groves?"

"We'll move out later," Blamey said curtly.

The Luftwaffe made a light raid on the first day, and next morning the villagers were all at a high pitch of nervous tension. Carlyon kept suggesting to Blamey, as tactfully as he could, that the sooner they moved out of Elasson the better it would be for themselves and everybody else in the neighbourhood, including the local inhabitants. Just before lunch Blamey gave in. He ordered that his office, as well as his living quarters, should be moved out to the olive groves. However, he would not agree that the Corps offices, as such, should be removed. About 4.30 in the afternoon a formation of twenty-two German planes flew out of the north and treated Elasson to a demon-

stration of pattern-bombing. Blamey, from the olive groves, watched the clouds of smoke and dust rise high above the village as the bombs tore it apart.

"I knew they wouldn't be long after us," he said.

Carlyon credited Blamey with extraordinary powers, but no such gift of divination as this remark suggested. He counted it a pure fluke that Blamey and he were not under the bombs in Elasson.

It was an extraordinary piece of good luck that the headquarters, which had suffered the full weight of the attack on Elasson, should have escaped decimation. Rowell, who had been away since early that morning on a visit to forward positions at Servia, was conferring with Blamey at the olive groves when the Luftwaffe struck at the village. He telephoned Bridgeford's office from Blamey's tent. The call was answered by Lieutenant-Colonel (later Lieutenant-General) Eric Woodward, A.Q.M.G.

"How are things there?" asked the worried Rowell.

"Well," said Woodward, "I'm lying on my guts on the floor hoping the house won't fall down on me."

But Blamey could be cool in face of physical danger. He was caught in a dive-bomber attack one day near the village of Soumpasi. The retreat was in progress, and vehicles jammed the road. Blamey and his party took refuge in a field about fifty yards from the road. They all went flat on their faces, except Blamey, who stood staring up at the German planes and, a familiar habit when he was concentrating, pecking with the tip of a forefinger at his bristling moustache.

"Get down, sir," Carlyon pleaded.

"It's all right, Norman," Blamey replied. "You can always tell by the flight of the bomb when it's going to be close."

Suddenly he dropped flat on his stomach, and Carlyon thought, *Well this must be it!* The bomb landed about sixty yards away on a tree. When the dust cleared nothing remained of the tree or five or six New Zealand gunners who had been sheltering under it. There was only a deep crater to mark the place where the tree had stood.

5

By the middle of April it was only a question of how much longer the Australians, New Zealanders, and British could hold on. The retreat had not become a rout; it never did become a rout. But the danger that the whole force would be enveloped, and that escape would become impossible, was very real.

Blamey believed that little time remained. The Germans, he reasoned, would be tempted to overwhelm his forces by April 25—the

twenty-fifth anniversary of Anzac Day. It would be a victory for German propaganda if Dr. Goebbels could announce that the Second World War Anzacs had been humbled and destroyed on the anniversary of the day their fathers had made famous by the dawn landing at Gallipoli.

It did not matter at this phase of the campaign whether a man was battalion commander or battalion cook, headquarters orderly or General Officer Commanding. Anyone who managed to snatch more than four or five hours' sleep in twenty-four was loafing on the job. The strain was stamped on every face. Even Blamey, who required little sleep, was showing signs of weariness.

There was only one main road down which the forces could retreat. It was under constant attack from the air. The endless line of trucks moving back along it passed through bomb-wrecked towns, some still in flames. Now and then the procession would halt while engineers repaired a shattered bridge—as north of Pharsala, where a dive-bomber scored a lucky hit on a truck loaded with aminol, which exploded with a roar that shook the countryside and sent the bridge crashing.

It was certainly, as Blamey had predicted, shaping for another Dunkirk.

He had a note from Maitland Wilson on April 20. It was scribbled in pencil on sheets torn from a scratch pad, and dated from Athens the day before. Wilson wrote:

My dear Blamey,

I hope that your withdrawal is going satisfactorily. If you bring it off without any serious mishap it will rank as a masterly operation of its kind.

I found things in Athens very bad yesterday. At a conference with the King and Papagos the latter has lost heart and is adopting the attitude what can do . . .

Wavell is coming over today, as we are faced with difficult decisions. Yesterday the Greeks were asking us to evacuate the country as soon as possible, but I hope by today they may not be of that mind and will join with us to fight the Germans . . .

It was not a cheerful letter for a man facing Blamey's problems. Wilson mentioned that Korizis, the Greek Prime Minister, had committed suicide—"which may clear the air, as the King is going to take over himself and the feeling in Athens has turned in favour of carrying on." However, between the time Wilson scribbled his note and its arrival in Blamey's hands, Wavell had reached Greece and the decision to evacuate had been taken. Wavell himself drove from

Athens to Blamey's battle headquarters, in a valley south of Levadia, to break the news. He reached his destination toward midnight of April 20. Wavell never knew that he was close to death by Australian bullets that night.

Lieutenant-Colonel (later Brigadier) Lloyd Elliott, Blamey's G.S.O. II (Operations), was in the duty tent when the telephone rang. Elliott's clerk answered the call and noted down a message. He had barely finished taking it when the line went dead. He handed the message to Elliott. It was an order from Wilson's headquarters that the next car to come up the road must be stopped "at whatever cost."

"It was given by a very nervous man, sir," the clerk told Elliott.

At that time landings by German paratroopers behind our lines were an hourly possibility. Elliott concluded that the car which had to be stopped was carrying a suicide squad of Germans who had been sent to kill Blamey. There was no way, with the line dead, of checking the meaning of the message, and he had to act quickly. He and the clerk hurried out into the night and took positions, one on each side of the road, the clerk armed with a rifle, Elliott with a revolver. They were determined to stop the next car "at whatever cost," but time dragged on and no car appeared. They learned later that the car had passed along the road before the telephone message reached them, which was lucky, since the car carried Wavell on his way to see Blamey. Wilson's headquarters had wished to intercept Wavell to let him know of an important change in plans.

While Elliott and the clerk were watching the road, Wavell and Blamey were sitting in the back of Wavell's car discussing the evacuation plans and studying a map in the light of an electric flash-lamp. Heavy rain thudded on the roof of the car, like a depressing obbligato to the words of the two men.

Twenty-four hours later Blamey waited in the darkness on the Plain of Thebes for a meeting with Maitland Wilson and Galloway, and Rear-Admiral (later Vice-Admiral) H. T. Baillie-Grohman, the leader of the staff planning the evacuation. Blamey and Carlyon reached the appointed spot at 11.30.

"What time is the rendezvous?" Blamey demanded.

"Midnight, sir," said Carlyon.

"Well," growled Blamey, who abhorred waste of time, "what the hell are we doing here at this time?"

Carlyon had been congratulating himself on having got there, in the darkness and rain, with so little time to spare, but he forbore to say so. He felt that Blamey was in no mood to listen.

"Well," Blamey grumbled, "I don't know what you're going to do, but I'm going to have a sleep."

He made himself comfortable in the back of the car, and was asleep in a few seconds. He did not stir until Carlyon, seeing the twinkle of approaching lights about midnight, tapped him on the shoulder. Ability to sleep when and where the opportunity presented itself, and wake with every faculty alert, was one of Blamey's gifts from the gods.

Wilson and Baillie-Grohman outlined the evacuation plans, and Blamey returned to his headquarters, and, in the early morning hours, conferred with Rowell and other of his senior staff officers. That day, April 22, was one of anxiety. About two o'clock in the afternoon a R.A.F. reconnaissance plane reported heavy movements of enemy troops on a road running down the west coast of Greece to the Gulf of Patras. This spelt danger. An east-west road linked this coast road with Levadia, by way of the Delphi Pass. A demolition party was at work on the pass, but there were no covering troops. A time and space calculation suggested that it would be practicable for the Germans to move in through the Delphi Pass and reach Levadia before the main withdrawal was under way. A mixed force from the 6th Australian Division was hurriedly sent out to cover the demolition party. In the event, they were not pressed; but these were tense hours.

That night Blamey paced up and down his tent, glancing now and then at his maps, smoking his pipe, and trying to estimate when the German column on the coast road would come through. It was the only time that Brigadier (later Major-General Sir) Clive Steele, his Chief Engineer, heard a note of urgency in Blamey's voice in the course of the campaign in Greece. The peril was obvious. A few hours one way or another in the time of the German column's arrival could mean the difference between capture and a chance of freedom for many thousands of men.

The German trap was threatening to close.

6

A message from Maitland Wilson awaited Blamey when he arrived at Mandra, the site of his last headquarters in Greece, at ten o'clock on the night of April 23. Mandra lies about fourteen miles north-west of Athens, on the road to Thebes. It could only be a matter of days now before the Germans were in Athens, gaping at Mount Lycabettus and clambering over the ruins of the Acropolis. The only thing that remained to be done was to save as many as possible of the officers and men of the British expeditionary force from falling into German hands. In this task, Anzac Corps was to have no active part. Its functions were to cease at midnight on April 23. Wilson's

message instructed Blamey to report to him at once. The hour was late, but the order was imperative, and at eleven o'clock Blamey rang the doorbell of Wilson's house in Athens.

Wilson told Blamey he was to leave Greece immediately and report to Wavell, in Cairo. Blamey said he did not wish to leave Greece until April 25. Anzac Day meant something to Blamey: he wanted to be with the Anzacs on that anniversary. Wilson said such considerations were nonsense at such a time. Blamey repeated that he still wished to stay until Anzac Day. Their voices rose a trifle.

"You must leave first thing tomorrow," Wilson said.

He handed Blamey an Army message form. It bore a radioed instruction from Wavell that Blamey was to return to Egypt as soon as he had handed over the field command. Blamey shrugged. He could hardly dispute the order of the Commander-in-Chief. Anyway, Wavell's order had a core of hard sense: Britain could not afford, for reasons of prestige, to see more generals fall into enemy hands after the somewhat inglorious loss of O'Connor and Neame in the Western Desert retreat.

Blamey's enemies were to assail him later for having "run out of Greece." The charge would have been ludicrous if it had been less offensive. Blamey left Greece in obedience to an order from his superior officer. He was not offered the choice of whether he should go or remain. Lieutenant-General Freyberg and Major-General Iven Mackay, respectively commanding the New Zealand and Australian divisions, each received a similar order from Wilson's headquarters on the afternoon of April 24. Mackay accepted the order, but Freyberg did not. His New Zealanders were still hotly engaged in the Thermopylae Pass area, and Freyberg refused to leave them—a chivalrous defiance of superior authority characteristic of one of the war's great fighting commanders.

Blamey and Carlyon drove from Wilson's house to the King George Hotel, in Athens. There, soon after midnight, they met a R.A.F. officer who told them a flying-boat would leave the Bay of Athens within a few hours. There would be room in it for Blamey and any six other Australians of his choosing. Blamey glanced at his watch. The time was about half an hour after midnight.

"We'd better have a cup of tea," he said, and when the tea was served he told Carlyon to get out pencil and paper and make a list of the flying-boat party.

Officers who would form the nucleus of a new corps headquarters were selected. Rowell was naturally the first to be chosen. Then the names of Wells, Eric Woodward, and Lloyd Elliott were added. Blamey told Carlyon to put his own name on the list. It was not a

matter of friendship, though Carlyon was one of the few men for whom Blamey, an undemonstrative man, ever betrayed more regard than that of senior officer for trusted assistant. Blamey took Carlyon, because Carlyon was as indispensable to him as one man can be to another. When they started back for Mandra the seventh place was still unfilled. Carlyon suggested Brigadier Bridgeford.

"No," Blamey said. "Bridgeford will stay here and take over from Rowell."

Other names were suggested and rejected. At last Blamey said:

"Well, we might as well take young Tom."

It was thus that Blamey's son, then a major serving as a liaison officer on Corps Headquarters, left Greece with his father.

Blamey was to be bitterly criticised, publicly as well as privately, for the rest of the war, and even after the war ended, on the score of this action. It was, said his critics, an example of ruthless favouritism: he rescued his own son while the sons of other men were left behind to risk death or capture. Even Blamey's defenders agreed that the decision was, by inflexible standards, injudicious; but they pardoned it as the expression of a father's natural desire to preserve the life of his younger son when his older son had died in tragic circumstances. The decision caused some eyebrow-raising when news of it spread among his headquarters officers at Mandra.

And Rowell, for one, was no longer happy about the disbandment of Anzac Corps headquarters. Blamey brought word from Wilson that the circumstances had compelled a revision of earlier plans for the embarkation of the troops. Most of them would now have to be lifted from beaches in the Peloponnese, instead of the Athens area. Rowell considered that Anzac Corps should remain in being to supervise this operation, and he said so in emphatic terms, but Blamey overruled his proposal.

Blamey's party was ferried out to the Sunderland flying-boat in a naval launch. The aircraft carried at least fifty passengers, a mixed bag of Navy, Army, and Air Force. It took off just before dawn, and touched down to refuel at Suda Bay, in Crete, ninety minutes later. The journey ended in the harbour of Alexandria at half-past one the same afternoon.

A barge sent by the Royal Navy's Commander-in-Chief in the Mediterranean, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham (later Admiral of the Fleet Lord Cunningham), bobbed alongside the Sunderland almost at once. The barge carried Blamey and Rowell, with Carlyon and young Blamey in attendance, to H.M.S. *Warspite*, Cunningham's flagship. The young R.N. officer in charge of the barge handed Blamey copies of recent Egyptian newspapers. The front pages were

filled with glowing accounts of the progress of the fighting in Greece. Anyone reading them would have been entitled to think the British were winning.

"My God," exclaimed Blamey, as his eye travelled down the columns, "we've been to the wrong war!"

On board *Warspite* after an unshaven lunch, Blamey and Rowell disappeared into Cunningham's quarters. They were with the admiral for about an hour, giving him a picture of the situation in Greece and impressing him with the importance of straining every resource of the Navy to evacuate the forces which were retreating into the Peloponnese. It was Blamey's last official act in the Greek campaign.

He went ashore, hurried to A.I.F. headquarters in Alexandria, established himself in an office, and dealt with a number of matters which had arisen in his absence. Then he went to the Hotel Cecil, intent on having a hot bath. Lady Blamey, whose Red Cross duties took her to Alexandria at regular intervals, was in the Hotel Cecil that afternoon, unaware of her husband's return. She looked up to see a wan and dishevelled figure in Australian officer's khaki walking toward her. He stopped in front of her and said, "Tom's upstairs."

"It's Norman!" she exclaimed recognising Carlyon under his battle stains. "You look like a little boy!"

Her husband was sitting in her room. He was grey with weariness, and to her he looked many years older than when they had said farewell in Cairo less than six weeks before.

Blamey had not known what post he was returning to when he left Greece that morning. He did not yet know it officially, but the Egyptian newspapers he saw in the Hotel Cecil printed an announcement which caused him to raise his brows. The announcement said he was to be Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Middle East.

9

"THE FIFTH WHEEL"

1

CAIRO was little changed since Blamey had last seen it. Another summer was at hand, and G.H.Q. officers were digging their immaculate summer gabardine out of the winter mothballs. They dined and wined and danced in the nightclubs, on the Continental Roof, at Shepheard's. The disaster in Greece seemed to belong to another planet. The only distasteful symptom of it was the occasional yelping gibe of a Cairo shoeshine boy aimed at the back of a British officer. "How you like Greece, officer?" the shoeshine boys taunted, ready to race for cover at the first sign of reprisal. Nothing wins more respect from the capricious Egyptian than contemplation of another's military success; nothing sharpens his derision more than contemplation of another's military failure.

Blamey liked Greece, as a military operation, not at all. He had not liked it when he was ordered to go there, and he liked it no better when, on the afternoon after he landed in Alexandria, he installed himself in his new offices in the huge grey-pillared building, surrounded by barbed-wire, which housed General Headquarters, Middle East, in Cairo.

The latest reports on Greece gave him little comfort, but at least they suggested that the disaster was less grave than it might have been, even that annihilation of the Australian, New Zealand, and British forces in Greece might be averted. Anyway, he could do nothing more to change the course of the battle. In the event, the end of the Greek campaign, as of so many campaigns fought by Britain in the early stages of its wars, was a kind of negative triumph. More than fifty thousand men, nearly four-fifths of the forces originally sent to Greece, were rescued in the late days of April. As Blamey had foreseen, it was another Dunkirk.

Blamey did not know at that time why he had been appointed Deputy Commander-in-Chief. F. G. Shedden, Secretary of Australia's Department of Defence, who had played a leading part in re-opening Australia's military door to Blamey, was with Menzies in London in

the early months of 1941, including the period of the Greek campaign. He suggested to Menzies that British generalship in the Western Desert had not been so successful as to raise any bar to Blamey's appointment as desert commander.

This was Menzies' view also. In fact, when the expedition to Greece was being prepared Menzies, in London, and Blamey, in Cairo, had, unknown to each other, proposed that Blamey should command it. The proposal was not unreasonable. Of the 55,745 British, Australian and New Zealand soldiers that Wavell sent to Greece, 33,845 were Anzacs. And of this number 17,125 were Australian. Blamey considered that he was entitled to the command, as a principle, since Dominions troops preponderated in the force. In a letter to Menzies he remarked that experience had taught him to "look with misgiving on a situation where British leaders have control of considerable bodies of first-class Dominion troops while Dominion commanders are excluded from all responsibility in control, planning and policy." In spite of Menzies' and Blamey's independent representations, Wilson was given the command in Greece. But when the inevitable disaster befell the expedition, Menzies was able to re-state the principle of his demand in more imperative terms. He urged General Sir John Dill, then Chief of the Imperial General Staff, that Blamey should be considered for "some important command such as the Western Desert or Egypt." He pointed out that if Blamey were given a post of this status Australia would "feel much happier because we could then have a feeling that we have an effective voice in decisions on the spot."

Menzies' request put the U.K. war leaders in a dilemma. On the one hand, something had to be done to appease the restiveness of the Dominions, whose forces had borne the costly brunt of the fighting in Greece; on the other, the sensibilities of "the Union of British Generals," always alert to resist any suggestion that a Dominions officer should be given a military plum, had to be reckoned with.

When Dill hesitated Menzies bluntly said, "Ask Wavell what he thinks of Blamey." Dill did so. In reply, Wavell reported that Blamey had shown himself in the operations in Greece "a fine fighting commander . . . and fitted for high command," and suggested his appointment as Deputy Commander-in-Chief. "I consider," Wavell observed, "such an appointment would be valuable and that Blamey would fill it well." The Australian Cabinet, impressed by Menzies' belief that the appointment would ensure Blamey "an effective voice at the right time," concurred.

So Blamey did not get the Western Desert command, or any other of a comparable nature. Instead, he became Deputy Commander-in-

Chief—an office created for him and signifying nothing, though it bore a resounding title. Nobody was better aware than Blamey himself that this was glory without power. He had become, in a phrase he used more than once, "the fifth wheel of the coach."

In a letter to Menzies, dated from Cairo on June 7, Blamey wrote: "The Home Government apparently intends to ensure that should any eventuality take place, a British officer shall be senior in this part of the world, and has promoted Lieutenant-General Maitland Wilson to general. I have been greatly impressed with General Wavell's complete honesty and directness, and hope that nothing untoward happens, because I have not been nearly so impressed with the officer who would presumably take his place."

Blamey realised that his Deputy Commander-in-Chief's wings, such as they were, were to be politely clipped by the simple device of promoting British officers so that they would out-rank him. At this time he was a lieutenant-general, the rank with which he had left Australia. He was not promoted to general's rank until September, 1941.

The situation did not improve as the weeks went on. Blamey wrote to Spender, Minister of the Army, on June 27: "The appointment has its awkward points, particularly for a Dominion officer, and I think there is a Machiavellian touch in its implementation. When General Wilson came back he was made a full general. . . . Haining [General Sir Robert Haining] was sent out here from the War Office to take over general administrative control as Intendant-General, with the rank of full General, and finally the local D.C.G.S. [Lieutenant-General (later Sir) Arthur Smith, Wavell's chief of staff] was made a C.G.S. with the rank of Lieutenant-General.

"General Wavell is very direct and honest, but he is an intense worker that likes to see everything and do much himself. . . . I am in the centre of all councils and discussions, and freely take my part in the discussions of the three C.'s-in-C. (Army, Navy, and Air). But, of course, the man in command must take all the responsibility, and, as the Chief of Staff is of the same rank as myself, it is not easy for him to defer to me."

In short, the Middle East coast was bowling along, and Blamey was part of it. But he knew it would have run just as fast without him. He was "the fifth wheel," and nothing more.

2

A series of surprises, if not shocks, met Blamey in Cairo. In a letter to Spender, he remarked that he returned to find the A.I.F. "scattered to the four winds." While he was on the spot, he had fought like a

panther against British attempts to fragment the A.I.F. In Greece he had had no means of knowing what was going on across the Mediterranean, nor any time to prevent it if he had known. Now the 6th Division was fighting its way out of Greece, and substantial elements of it would soon be helping to fight the Battle of Crete. The 9th Division was besieged in Tobruk. The 7th Division was sundered into three parts—the 18th Brigade in Tobruk, the cavalry regiment in the island of Cyprus, the rest of the division in Palestine.

Brigadier Ronald Irving was one of the first Australian officers to report to Blamey at G.H.Q. Irving expected it to be an awkward interview, because it was he who had given authority for the cavalry regiment to be sent to Cyprus about the time the Tobruk siege began. Even then the fall of Greece had been clearly a matter only of weeks. It had been equally clear that when Greece was overrun the Germans would attack Crete or Cyprus, perhaps both. Wavell, whose command covered Abyssinia, the Western Desert, Iraq, Palestine, and the Mediterranean, was desperately short of forces. It was with this knowledge that Irving heard a request that the 7th Division Cavalry Regiment should go to Cyprus. No A.I.F. officer of more senior rank was on hand to take off Irving's shoulders the responsibility of having to give a decision, which was required at once. After a few hours' uncertainty Irving consented, and the regiment was sent to Cyprus.

Now that he was face to face with Blamey, he felt no good purpose could be achieved by temporising.

"First, sir," he said, "some A.I.F. units are wrongly disposed, in terms of your Charter."

"Yes?"

"To give you the worst example first, 7 Div. Cav. is in Cyprus."

"What?" Blamey bristled and sat upright in his chair.

Irving explained the circumstances. He also told Blamey that arrangements were in hand to relieve the regiment and restore it to its parent formation.

Blamey relaxed and said, "Well, since you have taken steps to correct a wrong decision, I suppose I must approve what you have done."

"I believe," Irving said, emboldened by the fact that at least he was not to be sent home to Australia in military disgrace, "you would have given the same decision in the circumstances, sir."

"I don't know what I should have done," Blamey growled, "but since it's been done and is being undone, I'll say no more about it."

He was determined now to gather the scattered A.I.F. into a single formation as soon as the task could be accomplished. He began pressing, suavely but insistently, for the regrouping of the Australians.

He believed there would never be a better opportunity than this of transforming into reality his and Freyberg's dream of an Anzac Corps. He outlined his thoughts to Menzies in a letter written early in June:

"I feel that if we could get two Corps established, Australian Corps and an Anzac Corps, and pull them together, it would help to establish the principle of working in fixed formations. That is my main reason for supporting the recommendations to that effect which emanated mainly from N.Z. forces. If units are moved from pillar to post they do not get to know their staff or other units of the formation, and the moral strength that would be built up with fixed organisations is not developed. It was the strength of the A.I.F. in the last war, but has had no chance to develop this time."

Blamey proposed that the 6th Australian Division and Freyberg's New Zealand Division should form the Anzac Corps, and the 7th and 9th Australian Divisions the Australian Corps. These formations, he hoped, would be completed, as a modern fighting force, by the addition of an armoured division—preferably Australian, or if this should be impracticable, then British. He planned that Freyberg should command the Anzac Corps, and Lavarack the Australian Corps, with himself exercising powers of general administration.

Of course, nobody, including Blamey, was then able to foresee that before the end of the year Japan would launch a Pacific war, which would necessitate the immediate return of two Australian divisions from the Middle East, and dispel the dream of creating an Anzac Army in North Africa.

3

As Deputy Commander-in-Chief, Blamey was able to play little more than a spectator's part in the Battle of Crete. But he was not an inactive spectator.

Crete was defended by a composite New Zealand, Australian, British, and Greek force, under Freyberg. The Australians were commanded by Brigadier (later Major-General) George Vasey, a tall, dark, muscular Staff Corps officer, who concealed deep sensitivity and a fine mind under a brusque exterior which deceived nobody who knew him. Vasey was destined to become one of Australia's greatest divisional commanders in the Pacific war. His future was foreshadowed after the campaigns in Greece and Crete, when Blamey, in a letter to Sturdee, wrote of him: "Vasey did particularly well. Not only did he have to stand the brunt of Greece, but he had a very trying time in Crete. He came out of it fresher than any other senior officer that came off that island."

Turning-point, Milne Bay

Blamey and Vasey

The Germans attacked Crete with paratroopers and glider-borne forces on May 20. The battle was over by the early morning hours of June 1, when ships of the cruelly battered Mediterranean Fleet ended the evacuation from Sphakia, on the south coast of the island.

Blamey wrote to Menzies a few days after the evacuation ended: "The leaving of so many of our fellows behind in Crete was a very sad affair for me, and I am afraid I pushed the Navy a little bit beyond reason to get them out. However, it came to the stage where any further losses to the Navy in the Mediterranean would make our position very precarious, and Admiral Cunningham, much to his own regret, was forced to make a date of termination."

The echoes of the Battle of Crete had hardly died when the Syria campaign began. The British feared, with sound reason, that the enemy was about to use Syria as a means of furthering his warlike designs upon the Middle East. The stand that the Vichy French garrison would take, in the event of an Axis attempt to occupy the country, was uncertain; but there was ground for suspicion that they lacked the resources, if not the will, to make any effective resistance. The British had to get their blow in first, or accept the risk that Syria would fall into Hitler's lap, thus isolating Turkey and giving the Germans a base for air and land operations against Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran. So on the night of June 7 Wavell sent Australian, British, Indian, and Free French forces into Syria.

Blamey had a long talk in Cairo a week before the campaign began with the gloomy and unpredictable General de Gaulle, the Free French leader. de Gaulle had come to Cairo to confer with Wavell and General Catroux, Middle East commander of the Free French forces. Blamey also flew to Palestine and discussed the coming operations with Maitland Wilson, British Commander in Palestine and Transjordan, and with Lavarack, Catroux, Rowell, and other senior officers.

He described the Syria campaign in a letter to Menzies, written on June 7, a few hours before the fighting began, as "largely a gamble." It was a realistic appreciation at a time when some high-ranking members of the Middle East Command were predicting, over cocktails in Cairo, that the Vichy French would greet our men with bottles of wine and garlands of flowers.

"If things go wrong, as they may easily do," Blamey remarked in the same letter, "I suppose there will be a cry for Wavell's blood and mine also. As you know, if you have somebody who can do the job better I would not be grieved, for I can assure you that it is no light burden to carry in the present conditions."

There was a marked absence of either flowers or wine when Mait-

land Wilson's forces crossed the Syrian frontier. The Free French struck for Damascus. Two brigades of the 7th Division advanced on a front from the Jordan to the sea, one moving toward the Litani Valley through Merjayoun, the other along the coast for Beirut. The Vichy French were not strongly equipped with modern arms or modern aircraft, but it was soon clear that they were going to dispute every foot of the advance.

Blamey spent many hours commuting by air between Cairo and the Syria front. Though he retained his post as G.O.C. of the A.I.F. in the Middle East throughout the term of his appointment as Deputy Commander-in-Chief, he lacked authority to take any but an advisory part in the overall conduct of the Syria operations. But he could, and did, exert a large measure of influence upon Maitland Wilson.

In Greece Blamey had formed no high opinion of Wilson's military skill. He saw no reason to amend this view as he watched the progress in Syria. He told Sturdee, in a letter dated June 26, that Wilson "was fighting the battle from Jerusalem, and I found a grave lack of grip on the part of his staff in the early stages of the operation." Blamey also observed that "the deadly habit of disintegrating organisations so typical of British methods had already set in before the Australian Corps took charge. However, I impressed upon them the necessity of maintaining the organisations intact, and insisted on Wilson pressing on Damascus, where he had his best chance. General Wilson, I am glad to say, is very amenable to discussion, and accepted the view, with excellent results."

These words held only a hint of certain curious events which occurred in Jerusalem in the early hours of the morning of June 20. Blamey had flown from Cairo to Haifa the day before, then driven to Nazareth, where Australian Corps Headquarters was established. Australian Corps had assumed control of the major part of the Syria operations on June 18. After talking with Lavarack, G.O.C. of the Corps, and Rowell, Blamey inspected the front, then returned to Nazareth for a late dinner. He was worried. The main attack was being made by the Australians on the coast. They had had desperately hard fighting, and Blamey believed the campaign could be brought to a speedier and less costly end by directing the major thrust at Damascus. After dinner he telephoned Wilson, in Jerusalem, and urged him to adopt this change. The telephone conversation ended with nothing decided.

Blamey glanced at his watch. The hour was about ten.

"We'll drive to Jerusalem and see Wilson tonight," Blamey told Carlyon.

They reached Jerusalem about midnight, and drove to Wilson's

house. Carlyon rang the bell, and told the young British officer who opened the door that Blamey wished to see Wilson.

"I'm afraid General Blamey can't see General Wilson now, old boy," the officer said. "General Wilson is in bed."

"But General Blamey's outside in the car," Carlyon remonstrated. "He must see General Wilson tonight. This is an urgent matter."

The young officer was courteously immovable. General Wilson was in bed. He was sorry, old boy, but . . . Both Carlyon and the British officer fell back as bootsoles scuffed on the steps and Blamey thrust between them and walked into the hall.

"I want to see General Wilson now," he said.

There was a few minutes' delay. Then Wilson appeared in a dressing-gown. There and then, Blamey told Wilson his convictions about the Syria fighting. Wilson listened, and when Blamey was finished, he said:

"All right. I'll get hold of Lavarack and Rowell in the morning."

"Not in the morning," said Blamey. "Tonight. Men are dying in Syria. This can't wait!"

"Very well," said Wilson, and without more ado he telephoned Australian Corps Headquarters and ordered that the main thrust should be directed against Damascus. It remains a matter of opinion whether the end of the Syria campaign was hastened by the results of Blamey's visit to Wilson on that night. Damascus fell on June 21, but the bitter struggle to reach Beirut continued for three more weeks before the Vichy French capitulated.

Men such as Major-General (then Brigadier) Jack Stevens, a thrusting leader, whose 21st Brigade Group was fighting its way along the coast, might well ask if, left to themselves, they would have reached Beirut less quickly. The story is told only as an example of Blamey's determination once he had reached a conclusion.

An event which was to have a heavy impact on Blamey's career in the Middle East took place on July 5, a week before the armistice in Syria. General (later Field-Marshal) Sir Claude Auchinleck took over the post of Commander-in-Chief from Wavell.

Now Blamey and Wavell differed on many points. But whether they agreed or disagreed on any military matter, there was never a breath of personal rancour between them. Blamey had a profound respect for Wavell's personal and military qualities, and a warm liking for the man himself. From the first he had no unrestrained liking for Auchinleck. "He's a bully!" he once told one of his own trusted officers. Nobody ever got far with an attempt to bully Blamey.

The plane which carried Wavell to India left Heliopolis at seven on the morning of the day after he surrendered his command to Auchin-

leck. Only two officers of his old Headquarters were at the airfield to see him go. They were Blamey and Carlyon. Tears stood in Blamey's eyes as, after a handshake, he watched Wavell walk across to the plane.

Blamey had his first official meeting with Auchinleck at 10.30 that morning. It was cordial enough. There was nothing to foreshadow the series of conflicts, as bitter as any in which a British and a Dominions general ever engaged, which lay ahead of them, notably their dispute over Blamey's insistence that the Australian garrison should be taken out of Tobruk before the siege was lifted.

In Wavell's day "the fifth wheel" had rolled along over reasonably smooth ground, even if it had been permitted to contribute little to the efficient running of the Middle East coach. In Auchinleck's day it was to strike some ugly bumps.

4

Blamey's determination that the Australian garrison of Tobruk should be relieved had its genesis in words spoken to him one evening in his mess at Gezira by Burston, his chief medical officer.

"What are the chances, sir, of the Hun putting in a sustained attack in the desert this year?" Burston asked.

"There's every chance," said Blamey.

Burston then told Blamey he had noticed that Australians on leave in Cairo from Tobruk appeared to be below fighting weight. He had checked the evidence of his eyes, and found that his observations were correct: most of the Australians in Tobruk were from 14lb. to 28lb. below normal weight. He doubted if they would have the physical reserves necessary to withstand the test of a sustained attack. When Burston was finished Blamey merely grunted. But he did not ignore Burston's words. He asked the opinion of Major-General (later Lieutenant-General Sir) Leslie Morshead, G.O.C. of the 9th Division and commander of the Tobruk Fortress. Morshead, a dynamic and aggressive commander, had never sought the relief of the Australians, but he agreed that if the enemy were to make a heavy attack his men would be short of staying-power: they would fight to the limit of their physical resources, but their stamina might be deficient.

Blamey was on firm ground now. On July 18 he wrote a long minute to Auchinleck, in which he said: "It is recommended that action be taken forthwith for the relief of the garrison at Tobruk. These troops have been engaged continuously in operations since March, and are therefore well into their fourth month. This strain of continuous operations is showing signs of affecting the troops . . .

"It may be anticipated that within the next few months a serious

attack may be made on the garrison, and by then, at the present rate, its capacity for resistance would be very greatly reduced. The casualties have been considerable and cannot be replaced.

"It would therefore seem wise to give consideration immediately for their relief by fresh troops, and I urge that this be carried out during the present moonless period.

". . . The agreed policy for the employment of Australian troops between the British and Australian Governments is that the Australian troops should operate as a single force.

"Because the needs of the moment made it necessary, the Australian Government has allowed this principle to be disregarded to meet immediate conditions. But it nevertheless requires that this condition shall be observed, and I therefore desire to represent that during the present lull in active operations action should be taken to implement this as far as possible. This is particularly desirable in view of the readiness the Australian Government has so far shown to meet special conditions as they arose.

"The Australian Corps . . . probably will be required in a month or two for further operations. If it is to render full value in accordance with the wishes of the Australian Government and as agreed by the British Government, it is necessary that action be taken early for its reassembly in order that the formations and units may be thoroughly set up as quickly as possible. . . .

"I can see no adequate reason why the conditions agreed between the Australian and United Kingdom Governments should not now be fulfilled."

Thus began the bloodless Battle of Tobruk, which was fought inside the walls of Auchinleck's G.H.Q.

There was an almost disarming serenity about the opening phases. Auchinleck, who was in London for higher strategic consultations from late July until early in August, agreed to the replacement of the 18th Brigade by a Polish brigade. He approved the arrangements after an exchange of telegrams with Blamey, in Cairo. By the end of August the 18th Brigade was out of Tobruk and assembling in Palestine.

Plans were also made in Auchinleck's absence for the relief of the 9th Division in the moonless period of September, when ships could travel between Alexandria and Tobruk in the relative safety from air attack which the cover of darkness gave them. The 6th British Division was to replace Morshead's men.

If Blamey suspected the arrangement was working too smoothly, he was right. When Auchinleck returned to Cairo he tackled Blamey almost at once about the 9th Division. He admitted that they had had a

good spell under siege conditions, but he refused to understand why they should not be capable of defending Tobruk for many months to come. He told Blamey he was planning a desert offensive for the late months of the year, and the timing of this drive might be threatened if a full division were to be relieved from Tobruk now.

Australian officers living in Blamey's mess at Gezira knew he was under some kind of strain at this time. He was abstracted, worried, moody. They whispered over their drinks, "The Old Man's got something on his mind." They were right. Blamey was arguing with Auchinleck about Tobruk almost daily.

Auchinleck asserted that the removal of the garrison and its replacement by fresh troops would impose too heavy a task on the Navy, and on the Air Force, which would have to give air cover to the ships engaged in the operation. Blamey answered that it would be a trying operation, but by no means an impracticable one. And he pointed out that it was his Government's wish that the relief should be accomplished. He had told Menzies of his demand, and he knew Menzies had cabled Churchill supporting the principle of relief.

Auchinleck would not accept Blamey's assurance that the physical quality of the 9th Division was deteriorating. He wanted first-hand confirmation, so Colonel C. E. M. Lloyd, Morshead's G.S.O. I, was flown from Tobruk to Cairo to see him. Lloyd called first on Blamey, who told him, "The Auk and I don't get on." Blamey also told Lloyd of a recent conversation he had had with Auchinleck.

AUCHINLECK: I want the 9th Division to stay in Tobruk. You must support me, as my deputy.

BLAMEY: I am your deputy, but I'm also G.O.C. A.I.F. I want them relieved.

AUCHINLECK: Talking of reliefs, if you take that tone I shall be compelled to ask for your relief.

BLAMEY: Go ahead and do it.

He did not tell Lloyd of another meeting he had had with Auchinleck about the same time. Auchlinleck was at his desk. Lieutenant-General Arthur Smith, his chief of staff, was at his right hand, with a pencil poised over a pad of paper. Auchinleck, looking thunderous, cross-questioned Blamey, while Smith took a note of the conversation. When the catechism was finished, Blamey started for the door. With his fingers on the handle, he turned back and said, "Next time, General, I'll bring a stenographer of my own!"

"This General of yours is a very difficult man," Auchinleck said, when Lloyd called to see him.

"No, sir, he isn't," said Lloyd. "He's a very wise old man. He's got a lot of support back in his own country. If it comes to a decision

between supporting you and Churchill and supporting Blamey, it will be Blamey."

"I don't think so," said Auchinleck.

"I assure you that's right, sir," said Lloyd.

Auchinleck grilled Lloyd about the 9th Division's condition. Lloyd, who would personally have preferred to see the Australians stay in Tobruk and fight in the campaign that Auchinleck was planning, supported Blamey's general argument. He told Auchinleck the division was, in his opinion, capable of fighting a defensive battle, with limited offensive tasks, but it was uncertain how fit the men would be in October or November.

The dispute between Blamey and Auchinleck dragged on through August and into September.

A complication developed on August 29, when Menzies resigned the Prime Minister's post and was succeeded by Arthur Fadden. Blamey had been certain of Menzies' support on the Tobruk issue; he did not yet know how firm Fadden would be under fire from Churchill. He wrote to Spender on September 8: "As you will realise from my wires to the Prime Minister, I am meeting considerable difficulties in my efforts to assemble the A.I.F. as a single body. It seems quite impossible for the ordinary English officer to appreciate the position from our point of view, and once any Australian unit gets into the command of a U.K. formation, it's like prising open the jaws of an alligator to get them back again.

"Hence, with one side willing and anxious to give the maximum of co-operation, there is always the fear, or really I should say the fact, that the other will not play in accordance with the rules. . . .

"As regards Tobruk, I am meeting with the greatest opposition from all sides. The Englishman is a born casuist. A plan was made for the relief. Everyone agreed. . . . In pursuance of the plan our 18th Aust. Inf. Bde. was relieved by the Polish Bde. and brought out without any great inconvenience. Then the Staff re-examined the position, and they thought that, in view of the offensive plans which are being prepared, it would be easier to leave our 9th Aust. Div. in. Then a crop of reasons were advanced, and the C.-in-C. even went so far as to claim that the relief was not a 'feasible proposition.' This, although more than one-fourth of the original garrison had already been brought out without much difficulty. . . .

"The position is that the 9 Aust. Div. was an incompletely formed, half-trained organisation when it met the German attack in March. It has been continually fighting ever since. It is in great heart, but there is a very definite decline in the physical condition of the troops. If they are left very much longer this will become very marked.

Unless the relief is made now it will be put off indefinitely. If so, and the enemy are able to make an attack on a large scale towards the end of the year, I have grave misgivings as to the results, and I feel quite sure that the Australian Government would not care to have another Greece and Crete experience.

"As to the prospects of such an enemy attack, there seems to be no immediate probability of it. But it is dangerous to assert that it will not be possible before the end of the year. Similar misplaced confidence when we were sent to Greece was the cause of our present difficulty and our being locked up in Tobruk. . . .

"The real point at the back of the objections to the relief is that the Australians have great fighting capacity. They believe here that they will hang on in any event, but that if they come out they must be thoroughly rested, and this will reduce the forces immediately available by a division. . . .

"It is a short-sighted policy, but one that one frequently meets amongst the British, to use up a division until it is worthless for months afterwards. . . .

"The matter is one for the Australian Government to decide, but I fervently hope our Government will take a strong stand on this question. If I lose this battle I will have very little hope of being able to retain the Australian formations intact in future, and I am convinced that they will make a force second to none if they can be placed so as to operate as an Australian force."

Beset on one side by cablegrams from Churchill pleading Auchinleck's case, on the other by cablegrams and letters from Blamey urging the case for the 9th Division's relief, the Australian Cabinet had to make a decision. It decided to support Blamey—a choice which "grieved" Churchill, to quote the word he used to describe his feelings in a message to Auchinleck.

However, it was nearly mid-September when Blamey went to a prearranged G.H.Q. conference, not yet knowing how far his Government would back him in the teeth of Churchill's and Auchinleck's implacable opposition to the 9th Division's relief. He only knew that he was prepared to put his head on the block in a final effort to force acceptance of his demand. After breakfast at Gezira he called Burston aside and said, "Will you be in tonight?"

Burston said he would.

"I'll have something to tell you," said Blamey.

He was in high spirits that evening. It was a marked change from his recent humour. After the meal he beckoned Burston to follow him out on to the veranda, and they stood together watching the moon rise over Cairo.

"Well, I've won," Blamey said.

"How did you do it?" Burston asked.

Blamey told him.

The conference had begun badly. Auchinleck said that he had considered all the factors, and had decided that Tobruk could not be relieved. Then Blamey said: "Gentlemen, I think you don't understand the position. If I were a French or an American commander making this demand, what would you say about it?"

"But you're not!" said Auchinleck.

"That's where you are wrong," said Blamey. "Australia is an independent nation. She came into this war under certain definite agreements. Now, gentlemen, in the name of my Government, I demand the relief of these troops."

Burston asked how they had taken this challenge.

"Well," Blamey said, "there was a stunned silence. Of course, I didn't know how far the Government would support me. Then the Auk shrugged and said, 'Well, if that's the way you put it, we have no alternative.' "

Blamey loaded his pipe and lit it.

"So now," he said philosophically, "I'm the most hated man in the Middle East."

He need have had no misgivings about the measure of support his Government would give him. Fadden had rejected Churchill's appeals, and instructions to Auchinleck that the 9th Division must be relieved were already in the making in London when Blamey delivered his ultimatum. Nobody would question Auchinleck's sincerity in the dispute. He was wounded by the Australian Government's support of Blamey, and only Churchill's intervention dissuaded him from resigning his post of Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. He and Churchill were to renew their pleas for the abandonment of the relief after the 24th Brigade Group, the first section of the 9th Division to be replaced, was lifted out of Tobruk late in September. Neither the Fadden Government nor John Curtin's Labour Government, which took office on October 3, would agree to cancel the arrangement.

Blamey himself, after inspecting units of the 24th Brigade Group in Palestine, was more determined than ever that the rest of the division should be relieved. He told his close advisers that what he saw confirmed his previous conviction that the Tobruk men were in good shape above the waist, but that their legs, for want of adequate exercise, would have failed them in a hard battle. By the end of October the whole of the 9th Division, except certain elements who

could not be lifted before the desert offensive began, was back in Palestine.

If there are military critics who suspect that Blamey was a shade Machiavellian in his discussions with Auchinleck about the relief of Tobruk, their suspicions are probably justified. It is true that Blamey made no secret of his wish that the Australians should be taken out of Tobruk, as an essential part of his plans for the re-grouping of the A.I.F. in the Middle East; but it is also true that he cited the physical deterioration of the Tobruk men as an overriding reason for his insistence upon the relief. Of course, the Tobruk men had lost a measure of physical sharpness after living for months under siege conditions. It would have been astonishing if they had not suffered some physical deterioration; besieged troops always do. But when they were relieved their fighting spirit was not only not impaired, but higher than it had ever been. And the weight of medical opinion was that they would have emerged with honour from any military test which might have been imposed upon them. The basic fact was that Blamey wished the A.I.F. to be assembled into one fighting force, and he did not hesitate to use any means in his effort to gain this end. Such qualms as he might have felt were soothed by the knowledge that Auchinleck could, without difficulty, find ample British troops to replace the Australians in the Tobruk garrison. Blamey was not guilty of risking the loss of Tobruk by taking the stand he did. He was merely doing his duty, as he saw it, to ensure that the A.I.F. was so grouped that it might be used, not as a number of unrelated formations, but as a national force.

For a change, "the fifth wheel," instead of following the Middle East coach, had pointed the course for the Middle East coach to follow.

10

PACIFIC CRISIS

1

AUSTRALIA'S War Cabinet met in Canberra on the night of November 18, 1941. Its members had been called together to hear Blamey give an account of his stewardship. It was an opportunity for them also to form an estimate of this controversial commander who seemed to raise storms wherever he went.

A few hours earlier Auchinleck had launched his "Crusader" offensive in the Western Desert. The absence of "the fifth wheel" on a visit to Australia had not been permitted to delay the opening of the campaign. Blamey's *amour propre* was not hurt by this apparent indifference to the value of his counsel as Deputy Commander-in-Chief. After all, only a small fragment of the A.I.F. was directly involved in the fighting. The Middle East could well run along without him for a month or so. So he had reasoned in Cairo when he had made his preparations late in October to leave for Australia. He was moved to make the visit partly by proposals from the Government that he should do so, partly by his own inclinations. He wanted to see for himself what was going on in the Australia he had left nearly eighteen months earlier.

He flew out of Cairo on November 2, and arrived in Sydney eight days later. And what he saw, or perhaps what he did not see, caused his strange eyes to spark and vitriol to sizzle on his tongue. He told newspaper interviewers on the day of his arrival:

"I am astounded at the complacency with which people in Australia view the war situation. You are leading a carnival life, and you are enjoying it. But if you do not take your part you'll find your homes overwhelmed, as were the homes of the people in France and Belgium. We are in a position where we must fight or perish."

Sydney was annoyed, rather than impressed, by these words when they appeared under three-column headlines in the *Daily Telegraph*. It was a jarring note for a homecoming traveller from the Middle East to strike at a time when summer was smiling and the surf beaches were calling.

In Canberra, Blamey had a preliminary meeting with members of the Government and the Advisory War Council. He talked with a succession of Ministers, including John Curtin, and Frank Forde, who was to be Minister of the Army for the rest of the war. In Melbourne he met again many senior officers of the Army, including his old chief of staff, Rowell, who had returned from the Middle East some months earlier to become Deputy Chief of the General Staff. The meeting with Rowell was cordial enough. None of the men about them saw any sign that the differences they had had over the events of the campaign in Greece were not dead. Or, anyway, sleeping.

When the Press came to Blamey, he once again took Australia to task.

"Candidly, it sickens me," he said. "I want to get away from it as soon as I can. Don't people know we are utterly up against it? If we don't win this war it means the end of us and the whole of the rest of the British Empire . . . I think the troops are more puzzled than anything else. I think they are puzzled by the grievances of people who are taking no risks, who are getting three times as much money as they are. Sometimes they may wonder about the making of heroes out of people who make shells but don't use them."

This was the old familiar Blamey, speaking his mind and saying, in effect, "Like it or lump it!"

He left himself wide open to attack when, on the Saturday after his arrival in Melbourne, he went to a race meeting and presented the Williamstown Cup to the winning owner. This, too, was the old familiar Blamey, acting in the old familiar indiscreet way. His critics fell on him, with cries of derision for the man who condemned "the carnival life," yet encouraged it by making an official appearance at the races.

"I had no hesitation in agreeing to the suggestion that I should present the Williamstown Cup," Blamey retorted. "My reference to carnival spirit was not to people engaging in any particular sport or diversion, but to the general attitude towards the war itself. I am not in favour of killing all forms of enjoyment. The older men, however, can carry on here. Great crowds of young men go to all sports meetings to watch young men play, and I think that is rather shocking. There is something sterner for young men to play at—and they will get all the thrills they want."

Blamey was speaking in the spirit which had animated the Tobruk garrison to spread the ironical story that they observed two minutes' silence a week: one minute for industrial strikers and one minute for footballers back in Australia.

He was not abashed by the storm he had started. He told Aus-

tralians they were "a lot of gazelles in a dell on the edge of a jungle," then went back to Canberra indifferent to the execrations that pursued him. His words probably did seem at the time to smack of poetic extravagance. Australians could not have guessed then that in less than three weeks the jungle would begin moving towards them. They had been hearing about the "Yellow Peril" all their lives. It was a tale you told to frighten naughty children, it could never become a reality: anyway, not in our lifetime.

In fact, the Government was more sensitive to the nearness of the peril than was Blamey. He recognised the danger that Japan might go to war in the Pacific; but he believed at this time that the Malayan barrier would prove to be strong enough to check the southward drive, even though he had been troubled by the evidence he had seen on his homeward flight of what he called "the atmosphere of 'Indian Garrison' life" in Malaya. When he talked to War Cabinet on November 18 he raised the question of the future of the 8th Division, then in Malaya. He wished the division to be sent to the Middle East, so that the whole of the A.I.F. abroad would be united, under his general command, in one theatre of war. Cabinet decided to take no action for the transfer of the 8th Division "at the present juncture."

Blamey started back for the Middle East early in December. He reached Cairo on December 9, two days after Japan bombed Pearl Harbour.

2

Japan's entry into the conflict changed the whole emphasis of the Second World War for Australians. Hitherto they had fought their wars on other people's territory: now a war threatened their own soil. Hitherto it had been London or Coventry that was bombed: now it might be Sydney or Melbourne.

News that Japan was landing troops in Malaya and Thailand made the shape of things to come all too plain. Except for men who had fought overseas in the first or second war, battles had no real meaning for Australians. They were merely something you read about in books and newspapers. This was all changed now. Old Blamey hadn't been talking through his hat, after all, when he had told Australians they were "a lot of gazelles in a dell on the edge of a jungle." It looked as if he had been more than half-way right, and unless something were done about it pretty quickly the gazelles would be gobbled up, and Australia would become a colony of the Mikado's Japanese Empire.

Australians, in general, kept their feet on the ground. There was no panic—certainly nothing resembling the hysteria that rocked the United States west coast when the news arrived of the Japanese

attack on Pearl Harbour. But it was an anxious time for Australians. The bulk of the nation's trained fighting-men, whether of the sea, land or air forces, were serving in war theatres thousands of miles from the Pacific area. It would be many weeks, many months perhaps, before they could come to the aid of their imperilled homeland.

Blamey knew that his dream of drawing the whole A.I.F. together in the Middle East was gone forever now, and that not many weeks would elapse before most, if not all, of the divisions under his command would be required to help block the onrush of the Japanese armies toward Australia. He had no means of foretelling what part, if any, he would be asked to play in the Pacific theatre. For all he knew, some other Australian general might take the Curtin Government's fancy. If that were to happen, then this was the sunset of his military career.

Early in January War Cabinet put the issue of the A.I.F.'s future beyond doubt. It sought Blamey's advice on which two Middle East divisions should be sent to the Far East. Blamey recommended the 6th and 7th. Curtin cabled Blamey on January 6 that the divisions would go to the Netherlands East Indies, where they would be under Wavell's supreme command. Curtin asked Blamey to decide if he should not accompany the force in view of the "predominant part which A.I.F. is likely to be called upon to play." Blamey replied that until a final policy was determined, he considered he should remain in the Middle East.

At this stage Blamey spent as little time as possible in Cairo. He was more often in Palestine and Syria, conferring with Lavarack and other senior officers, supervising plans for the move of the two divisions, wrestling with the problem of his own future. At the beginning of February he cabled Australia: "If you approve propose move personally Far East as soon as situation here sufficiently clear."

Yet even in the midst of the complex tasks the outbreak of the Pacific war had thrust upon him, Blamey was still the man of insatiable curiosity. He could always find an hour or two to see something new or meet some personality who interested him. Thus, driving down from Beirut on February 10, he stayed for lunch at King Abdullah of Transjordan's winter camp in the Jordan Valley. He was accompanied by Major-General (later Lieutenant-General Sir) Edmund Herring, then commanding the 6th Division, with Carlyon in attendance.

Abdullah I, a descendant of the princely House of Hashim, which sprang from the prophet Mohammed, received them in a huge tent. He was dressed in a richly embroidered robe and white kaffieh, with black headband. Black-moustached, black-bearded he sat in a great

chair, every inch a monarch. The impact of his personality on Blamey, Herring, and Carlyon was almost physical. Just before they were ushered in one of Abdullah's young officers told Carlyon, "Only one thing. Tell your generals not to cross their legs while they are talking before lunch." Carlyon whispered the injunction to Blamey and Herring, then followed them into the king's presence.

Blamey sat at Abdullah's right hand, with Herring beside him. Brigadier (later Lieutenant-General) John Bagot Glubb, the one-time British regular officer who had commanded the Arab Legion since 1939, was on Abdullah's left, with Carlyon at his side. Abdullah launched into a swift flow of Arabic. Glubb translated the words into English, then rendered Blamey's reply into Arabic. They tossed the conversational ball back and forth like two old friends.

Abdullah was the kind of man Blamey understood. He had been a fighting man almost since he was old enough to hold a rifle. As a child in his native city, Mecca, capital of Hejaz, he had known the cruelty of Turkish rule. His experiences then had prepared him to play his part in the first war, as one of the makers of the Arab revolt in 1916. In the second war he was with Britain again, the most unswerving of all the Arab rulers in his allegiance to the anti-Axis cause. Later still he was to lead the Arab forces in the post-war battle for the Holy Land, and in July, 1951, to die at a terrorist's hands as he was about to enter the Mosque of Omar, in the Old City of Jerusalem, to pray at his father's tomb.

Abdullah was not merely a warrior. He was also a poet, a man of deep learning. He could talk battle tactics, but he could also discuss with insight the fine things of literature and art. Blamey possessed many similar qualities, though he never paraded them. Now, fascinated by the good talk, he leaned forward, intent on the words passing from Abdullah to him through Glubb's lips.

And suddenly Carlyon's hands began to sweat. Blamey, forgetting the instruction whispered to him as he entered Abdullah's tent, lifted his right leg and crossed it over the left. Carlyon feverishly tried to catch his eye and send him a signal which would tell him that he was committing an act of profound disrespect—roughly equivalent to shedding your coat, opening your collar and putting your feet on the mantelpiece in the presence of the British Sovereign. But Blamey's eyes were fastened on Abdullah. Not for an instant did they stray in Carlyon's direction. Whether or not his Hashimite Majesty noticed the infringement his face betrayed not a flicker of annoyance. They talked on and on, until at last the king rose, and the three Australians and Glubb followed him into an adjoining tent and sat down to an Arabian Nights luncheon, course after course of rich food,

while outside the music of a band throbbed through the soft air of the Jordan Valley.

It was not until they were driving south to Gaza in the late afternoon that Carlyon felt really at ease. He had feared the leg-crossing incident would rise like a ghost to blight their leave-taking.

It was something of a shock to step from the medieval splendour of Abdullah's encampment back into the workaday world of military affairs and the realisation that, in the Pacific and over Europe, a war which threatened the lives and homes of all mankind was still thundering on.

3

These were black days for the nations arrayed against Japan, Germany, and Italy.

Blamey's outward calm was not ruffled when he heard the news of Singapore's fall on February 15, with the loss of two-thirds of the 8th Australian Division, and of the other Pacific disasters. But he would have been more, or less, than human if his courage had not flickered. However, he was a soldier. He had behind him the greater part of four decades of military experience. He knew that battle after battle can be lost, but that the war is never won until the last shot is fired. He was not fool enough to believe one man can change the course of world events: the best he can do is to play the part allotted to him as well as he is able. Blamey went on playing his allotted part.

Now, for a change, he was a mere spectator, instead of the motive force, of a military squabble between the British Government and the Australian Government—the affair which Churchill, in Volume IV of *The Second World War*, described as "a painful episode in our relations with the Australian Government." The occasion of this "painful episode" was Australia's refusal to permit the 7th Division, then bound for the Netherlands East Indies, to be diverted to Burma for the defence of Rangoon.

After Malaya's fall, Wavell had determined that the Netherlands East Indies was indefensible. The Australian Government then had to decide whether the returning A.I.F. should be thrown into new battles overseas or gathered for the immediate protection of Australian soil. It decided the A.I.F. should come home. The Government took another decision about the same time. Curtin cabled Blamey on February 20: "It is desired that you arrange to return here as speedily as possible." Curtin's message gave Blamey no clue to the nature of his post. He knew that if he was to have the task of directing Australia's defence he would have to find the answers to a set of problems as knotty as any in the military text books. Sturdee, Chief of the

General Staff, had advised Curtin that, even if the A.I.F. were brought home, there would be only a "sporting chance" of successfully defending the country.

As if to leave no doubt of the earnestness of their intentions, the Japanese, on the day before Curtin bade Blamey return, sent their bombers over Darwin, Broome and Wyndham, on the north coast, and left the three towns devastated. It was the first time in Australia's history that the mainland had come under enemy attack. In January the Japanese had taken Rabaul, in New Britain, and were entrenching themselves in preparation for their spring to the mainland of New Guinea, and their drive against Port Moresby. The pattern was clear to any soldier. Australia would have to fight or perish. Time had run out for the "gazelles in a dell."

Blamey flew out of Cairo on March 7, headed for South Africa. The Pacific conflict had broken the air link between the Middle East and Australia, and the greater part of the journey home would have to be made by ship from Cape Town. Lady Blamey and Carlyon travelled with him.

Auchinleck, whose warmth was almost affectionate now that "the fifth wheel" was leaving the coach, Freyberg, Galloway and other senior officers of the fighting services were at the airport to say farewell. Morshead, who was to stay on with the 9th Division, was also there. He knew something of the war Blamey had waged to prevent the A.I.F. from losing its national character by being splintered into a plurality of battle groups. He was to have a similar war himself later, as the inheritor of Blamey's appointment as G.O.C. of the A.I.F. in the Middle East.

When the plane was in the air Blamey re-read Auchinleck's farewell note. It was handwritten, in a sprawling, slightly backhand script, and the words left Blamey with a kindlier feeling for the Commander-in-Chief. The letter said:

My Dear Blamey

I feel a very genuine regret at your going, and I know I shall miss you a lot. We may have had differences of opinion at times but I have valued greatly your shrewd and sound advice on many matters, and it has been a great support to me to know that I could turn to you when in doubt or trouble. You have done much in and for the Middle East in the months that are past and you will be missed and not easily forgotten. The departure of you and all your fine officers and men will leave a gap not to be filled easily, and will cause me much real sorrow, for I have formed a real affection and a tremendous admiration for the A.I.F. I have seen a good deal of them, thanks to your assistance; I only wish I could have seen more.

I feel it is a great privilege to have had them under my command and I know very well how much I owe to them and to you.

I wish you and them the best of luck in the future and a speedy victory against the Japanese. I wish I could go with you to help you to beat them. Perhaps we may meet again over there. I hope we will.

Even on his way to play his part in the direction of battles which there was only a "sporting chance" of winning, Blamey was still hungry for new experiences. He had never seen elephants in their wild state, and now, he decided, there was an unsurpassed opportunity to do so. As the plane flew southward, over Kenya and toward Tanganyika, he told Carlyon he wished the pilot to travel low so he could get a glimpse of the wild life on the ground. The pilot pursed his lips and said: "It gets very bumpy in these parts when you fly low!" However, he agreed to take the plane down to a height of little more than tree-top level, since Blamey was so eager to do some birds'-eye exploring.

The plane bucketed along like a switchback car. Most of the passengers grew pale, some a sickly green. The pilot beckoned, and Carlyon groped his way forward.

"Are you sure you want to go on with this?" the pilot asked.

Carlyon shrugged. It was Blamey's wish. Blamey himself had not turned a hair. He had his nose flattened against the window beside his seat, and his eyes were darting from point to point of the jungle as it flashed by below. No elephant, or any other wild animal, had shown itself, but Blamey had a child's confidence that patience would be rewarded. Carlyon edged back to where Lady Blamey sat.

"Are you all right?" he asked her.

"I'm terrible," she said, looking it, "but don't tell Tom. I know he's so keen to see everything."

Carlyon moved along the plane and tapped Blamey on the shoulder.

"Practically everybody's sick, sir," he said. "Don't you think we should go a bit higher?"

"No," Blamey snapped. "I want to see some elephants."

Carlyon made his last throw. He said that Lady Blamey was almost on the point of collapse. Blamey glanced at his wife. Carlyon had not exaggerated. She looked as if she might faint at any moment. Blamey sighed. He was to be denied his armchair sight of Darkest Africa after all.

"Oh, all right," he said. "Tell the pilot."

The plane climbed back into smooth upper air. It had all been

in vain, anyway; Blamey had not caught even a momentary flash of an elephant's tail.

Blamey joined the *Queen Mary* at Cape Town on March 15, and the ship left for Australia that afternoon. It was loaded with American troops on their way to help in fighting the Battle of Australia.

He heard the news of MacArthur's appointment as Supreme Commander in the South-West Pacific Area on March 18 when the *Queen Mary* was still five days from Fremantle. It was the cocktail hour, when the six hundred or so officers travelling in the *Queen Mary* were accustomed to assemble in the lounge to hear a relay of the day's news picked up by the ship's radio. The relay, which was made over the ship's speaker system by Americans with peacetime radio experience, was usually presented in burlesque style; but there was no burlesqueing of the first bulletin that evening.

"General Douglas MacArthur has been appointed Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces, South-West Pacific Area," crackled the news reader's voice.

All the Americans in the lounge stood up and cheered. Not to be outdone, Blamey and his party stood up and cheered also. Carlyon was watching Blamey's face. It betrayed nothing but the controlled interest of a man who has heard an announcement of some historic importance. Yet, for all Blamey knew, the words might have meant that the end of his military career was closer than it had ever been. He heard the rest of the news relay with a calm face. But he must have been speculating about his future, about the circumstances in which MacArthur had been chosen to direct the fighting in the Australian theatre.

When the relay ended, the Australians left the *Queen Mary's* lounge. Blamey walked away toward his cabin. Carlyon followed him. In the cabin he sat on the end of Blamey's bed and looked at him.

"What do you think of that, sir?" he asked.

"I think that's the best thing that could have happened for Australia," Blamey replied.

"Why do you say that?" asked Carlyon, a trifle surprised.

"Well," Blamey said, "MacArthur will be so far away from his own Government that he won't have any interference from them, and as far as our Government is concerned he won't take any notice of them."

Carlyon knew a sense of relief. Whatever personal disappointment the announcement had given Blamey, his powers of realistic thinking were unimpaired. The Old Man's feet were still planted firmly on the ground.

Major-General E. C. P. Plant, G.O.C. Western Command, came

out in a naval launch to meet the *Queen Mary* when the ship anchored in the Fremantle roadstead on March 23. He handed Blamey a letter from Curtin. The letter told Blamey that the Government proposed to appoint him Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Military Forces. At last Blamey knew where he was going; or, at least, he knew the direction in which he was going. Everything depended now on the quality of his nerve, not to mention the position of his lucky star.

He had known there were a number of rivals for the post he had been given. Lieutenant-General Gordon Bennett, who had escaped from Malaya after the fall of Singapore, was one. Bennett had reached Sydney on March 1, and had flown to Melbourne to meet the War Cabinet next day. Cabinet might well have decided that Bennett was the man to lead Australia's army against Japan. Lieutenant-General Lavarack was another potential Commander-in-Chief whose claims could not be lightly dismissed. Lavarack had been named Acting General Officer Commanding-in-Chief on March 11, while Blamey was on his way from Cairo to Cape Town. It was well for Blamey's peace of mind that he did not know until after Curtin's letter was in his hands that this appointment had been made. He might have misread its implications, and added a few more to his thickening crop of white hairs.

However, when he landed at Fremantle on the afternoon of March 23, it was with the knowledge that he was still, officially, Australia's senior soldier. A command infinitely larger and more complex than Monash's in the first war awaited him. It was to be no sinecure. For more than three years it was to demand all his energy of mind and body. He was to be more or less constantly under political and sectional attack. Blamey knew what to expect. He was not surprised when his expectations were realised.

"Every man in public life in our country is regarded by someone as a fit target for mud," he once told a friend. "Unfortunately, some of that mud will stick. That is why they throw it, and that is the price you have to pay for taking your share in national affairs. You have to learn to ignore these people."

Except when, impelled by some puckish impulse of defiance, he deliberately chose the path of indiscretion, Blamey was reasonably well skilled in protecting his back against unfriendly knives. He never, unless with full knowledge of what he was doing, committed to paper words which could be produced long afterwards, taken out of context, and used against him as evidence of his human fallibility.

When Major Charles Spry was acting for a few days as his personal assistant in Cairo, Blamey instructed him to write an

appreciation of the general war situation for the Australian Cabinet. Spry produced a four-page typewritten document. He made a series of prophecies, including one that Germany would attack Russia on a certain date, which was within six days of the date, June 22, 1941, on which the attack was actually made. Spry proudly carried his paper to Blamey, who took the four sheets and began to read. He reached for a blue pencil. He crossed out the first line, then the second, and so on, line by line, page by page, until little remained but a succession of blue-pencilled lines.

"Charles, you'll probably go a long way in the Army," he said, "so I'll give you a piece of advice. When you are dealing with the politicians, never prognosticate. They'll remember it for two, ten, or twenty years, then bring it up against you and beat you over the head with it. . . . Now what are the facts?"

Spry took away his butchered masterpiece and wrote a new appreciation confined strictly to facts, which were that the British were planning a Western Desert offensive. And that was all.

It was a good example of the Blamey method. For the most part, he played his cards close to his chest. He never made any claim to infallibility, nor did any of his objective admirers make it for him. But he had the faculty of being wrong only twice where the best of his rivals were wrong three times. The difference was large enough to set him on a pinnacle of his own.

Before his appointment as Commander-in-Chief came to an end he was to need all his shrewdness, as well as all his patience, tenacity, and determination, and his gift of simulating an ironclad indifference to criticism. For Blamey was not indifferent to criticism. Even the insupportable charge that he had "run out of Greece" cut deep. He did have an uncommon capacity for absorbing criticism, and the surface wounds it made healed quickly. But the poison stayed in him, a centre of inflammation. Its presence was sometimes expressed in acts of ruthlessness which otherwise appeared inexplicable.

He had nearly forty-eight hours in Perth before he caught the east-bound trans-continental plane. His mind was busy even then with the problem of protecting Western Australia against invasion and enemy occupation in the months immediately ahead. For Western Australia was horribly vulnerable.

"Had the Japanese wished to seize it," Blamey wrote later, "Western Australia, with its vast potential wealth, might have fallen an easy prey to them in 1942. While it would have extended their commitment to a tremendous degree, it would have given them great advantages. At that time it could probably have been captured and controlled by a force no greater than that used to capture Malaya.

Its capture would have cut off Australia from all the British areas to the west. Its communications with the remainder of Australia depended almost entirely on the sea and on the tenuous single track overland railway inadequately provided with rolling stock; and therefore very difficult to reinforce rapidly. The occupation of Albany in the south, with its splendid anchorage, would cut right across the routes across the Indian Ocean. Its own resources were too limited to allow of a protracted defence."

It must have been a wry experience, for Blamey, to walk, in general's uniform, the streets of the city he had left thirty-six years earlier as a £140-a-year school-teacher who had more or less badgered the Australian Army into granting him a commission.

As it turned out, his departure from Perth in 1942 was not precisely triumphal. He was travelling by a commercial airline, operating under austere wartime conditions, and at the airport he was told he would be permitted to take only thirty-six pounds of baggage. Blamey called for the dispatch officer and said:

"Unless my baggage goes, I don't go."

"I'm sorry," the airline officer said, "but all excess baggage has to be offloaded from the plane."

"Very well," said Blamey. "If you touch one piece of my baggage, I don't go on the plane. Now it's up to you to take the responsibility of telling the Prime Minister where I am."

The baggage went, and Blamey with it.

He reached Melbourne in the early hours of next morning, and the same evening he and Sturdee caught a train for Canberra. He returned to Melbourne by air next day armed with the powers of Commander-in-Chief, Australian Military Forces. He was no "fifth wheel" now, but a vital part of the South-West Pacific Area fighting machine.

11

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

1

A WEEK after the announcement of his new appointment Blamey wrote a letter of resignation to John Curtin. It was on Good Friday morning, April 3. He and Carlyon were walking to Victoria Barracks, Melbourne, when he said:

"Norman, will you see if you can locate the Prime Minister? I think he's spending Easter in Melbourne."

Carlyon reached Curtin by telephone at his hotel, and said Blamey wished to call and see him. Curtin said he would himself come to the barracks, and within an hour he and Blamey were closeted together. Blamey had a clipping of a news item from the previous evening's Melbourne *Herald* in his hand. The story had been printed prominently on page 3, under a three-column headline which proclaimed: *General Gordon Bennett to be Corps Commander.* The news item followed:

"Lieut.-General Gordon Bennett has been appointed a corps commander.

"This was announced today by the Minister for the Army (Mr. Forde), when giving details of the Australian Army reorganisation."

The *Herald* story then went on to list also Lieutenant-General Rowell's and Lieutenant-General Northcott's appointments as corps commanders, Major-General Stevens' appointment to a divisional command under Bennett, and Brigadier (later Major-General) W. M. Anderson's appointment as Bennett's chief of staff. To the military mind, these details were important clues to the command structure of the Australian Army. Their publication must have caused the Japanese Intelligence Service to rub its hands with glee. Blamey was incensed. He recognised the force of the argument that public morale would be stimulated by knowledge of the plans that were being made to defend Australia; but he was adamant that the good likely to be achieved would be heavily outweighed by the evil the disclosure would do to the Army's plans.

"I have something in my hand," he told Curtin. "I don't want to give it to you unless there is no other course."

He held in his hand his letter of resignation.

One of Curtin's gifts was a talent for conciliation. He had developed it in the Labour Party's early days, when dissident factions had had to be reconciled and induced to work together in the common cause. He was to use this talent throughout the Pacific war to persuade some Labour members of Parliament, who regarded Blamey as a ruthless militarist, to accept him as Commander-in-Chief. He used it on Blamey now. Nobody else, said Curtin, who never wavered in his belief that Blamey was the nation's best soldier, had so rich a measure of the qualities Australia's Commander-in-Chief required: his retirement would be unthinkable.

"Then," said Blamey, his anger cooling, "the only way I can carry on is if I have direct access to you on any matter on which I feel personal consultation is necessary."

"Most certainly," said Curtin.

He told Blamey then that he was planning to substitute a Ministry of Defence for the Ministry of Defence Co-ordination. He himself would be the Minister, and he intended that Blamey should have direct access to him on any matter of high importance.

This was one of the earliest episodes in the wartime partnership between Blamey and Curtin, which grew, as the months went on, into something not far from friendship—oddly enough, since Curtin, the political idealist, and one-time anti-conscriptionist, and Blamey, the military technician, were philosophically poles apart. Curtin was never influenced by tales carried to him by Blamey's enemies. And there was no lack of tale-bearers. "Mateship" was a word Curtin often used to express an idea which can be adequately conveyed by perhaps no other term. To him, Blamey was a mate, in the full sense. As such, Curtin defended him, in private and in public.

Blamey quickly learned to admire Curtin's statesmanlike qualities, but personal liking was born first. Blamey had a warm liking also for Norman Makin, then Minister of the Navy, and later Australia's first Ambassador to the United States. But it was Curtin, of all the members of the Labour Cabinet, who commanded his deepest affection. No man dared sneer at Curtin in Blamey's hearing. He caught a scoffing remark about Curtin in his mess one evening when his Advanced Headquarters were in Brisbane. He swung on the speaker.

"Do you realise you're speaking of the Prime Minister?" he rasped. "I won't have any criticism of the Prime Minister, whatever his politics may be."

Given a Prime Minister who was hostile, or even indifferent,

Blamey could hardly have succeeded in his gigantic task. His success was a measure scarcely less of John Curtin's quality than of Blamey's.

He came to his task with the knowledge that some Australians, including at least a few men of military or political influence, believed that a fifty-eight-year-old Commander-in-Chief was beyond the age where he could carry the burdens of the office. He had long known that certain senior officers of the Staff Corps were preaching the doctrine that we were fighting a "young man's war." The implication was that Blamey—if not Blamey in person, then any man of Blamey's age—was too old to exercise the powers of leadership, and that these should be placed in younger hands. The doctrine had won no substantial body of support, but it gained new strength coincidentally with the onrush of the forces of Japan toward Australia.

However, this doctrine was not the motive of three generals, Herring, Steele, and Vasey, who, somewhat after the middle of March, had proposed to Frank Forde, Minister of the Army, that Australia needed a young and dashing leader to galvanise the military forces and inspire the nation. This episode has been called "the revolt of the generals." It was not a revolt in any sense of the term. Herring and Steele, both militia officers, were unwavering admirers of Blamey from the day he became Australia's senior commander until the day he stepped down. And there is no evidence that Vasey, a Staff Corps officer, did not share their opinion.

The impulses which moved them are not hard to understand. Blamey was even then on his way home from the Middle East, but this fact was a Cabinet secret. For all the Army at large, and the public, knew, he was marooned in North Africa, and likely to stay there indefinitely. It was on this assumption that Herring, Steele, and Vasey based their action. They, and many other senior officers, were concerned about the fitness for the Commander-in-Chief's office of other logical claimants. They were also troubled about the state of civilian morale, as expressed by what they saw, rightly or wrongly, as a panicky emphasis on preparations for camouflage and bomb disposal in Melbourne, Sydney, and other capital cities far distant from the potential battleline. They believed that Australia needed a top military commander endowed with knowledge, powers of leadership, supreme self-confidence, and a gift for the dramatic: a strong man who could take hold of the pieces of the chaotic military jig-saw and assemble these into some kind of intelligible pattern at once. It was a task which called for immediate action. In some quarters the episode was, and still is, interpreted as the expression of a conspiracy to overthrow Blamey. There is nothing to support such a

theory. Herring, Steele, and Vasey did not claim to speak for anybody other than themselves.

They nominated, as Commander-in-Chief, Major-General (later Lieutenant General) Sir Horace Robertson. Robertson, then aged forty-eight, had returned from the Middle East to become G.O.C. of the 1st Cavalry Division, stationed in New South Wales. He had earlier won a reputation for daring, unorthodoxy, and *flair* by his leadership of the 19th Brigade in Wavell's first offensive in the Western Desert. The red-haired Robertson, "Red Robbie" to his men and the public, had a compelling presence, personal magnetism, and unalloyed confidence in his own military ability, as well as the ability itself. His most ardent champions believed him to have all the attributes of a great commander.

Herring, Steele, and Vasey also proposed to Forde that all generals over the age of fifty should be retired. This was something of an after-thought. The suggestion was prompted by the idea that a young and virile Government could best open the way for the appointment of a young Commander-in-Chief by gracefully disposing of a heavy upper crust of generals who might be considered, militarily, past their prime, especially for campaigning in the wearing conditions of the tropics. The adoption of this proposal would have disqualified, anyway from active commands, not only Blamey, but also Lavarack, Morshead, Bennett, Mackay, Northcott, Sturdee, Savige, and some other generals whose names were familiar to every Australian. Herring and Steele would also have disappeared almost at once, since each was within a few months of fifty. So their disinterestedness was beyond question.

Forde did not doubt the sincerity of the men who made the proposals. But he saw that, if the Government were to take so radical a series of steps, it would mean the arbitrary retirement of a large body of seasoned generals whose services Australia could not spare at such a time of military crisis. Forde also realised that an inferential declaration that commanders were too old at fifty for the Pacific war would scarcely be agreeable to sixty-two-year-old Douglas MacArthur, who had just entered the S.W.P.A. as supreme commander. As for the proposal that Robertson should be appointed Commander-in-Chief, Curtin, Forde, and the rest of the War Cabinet already had their sights set on Blamey. Naturally, Robertson's sponsors were not aware of this fact.

Blamey inevitably heard later the details of the proposals. Since nothing had come of them, he lost no sleep over the affair. But he himself was impatient of the "young man's war" doctrine. He did not agree that a fit man of fifty-eight was less qualified than a fit man

of forty-eight to lead the nation's military forces. If he had ever seriously doubted the honesty of purpose of the men who approached Forde, heads would have fallen. In fact, no heads fell. On the contrary, late in September, 1942, Blamey chose Herring to be G.O.C. of 1st Australian Corps and New Guinea Force; Herring was still G.O.C. of 1st Corps when he retired from the Army to become Chief Justice of Victoria in February, 1944. Steele was appointed by Blamey to be Engineer-in-Chief of Allied Land Headquarters; he held that appointment when the war ended. To Vasey, Blamey gave command of the 7th Division at the height of the Kokoda Trail operations, and unstinting praise as one of Australia's greatest fighting generals.

It is true that, late in 1942, Steele, on a visit to New Guinea, discerned a certain frigidity in Blamey's manner. Troubled, he made some inquiries. These disclosed that Blamey had heard of Steele's part in the deputation to Forde, and was dubious of his Engineer-in-Chief's loyalty. Steele demanded an interview with Blamey and told him the story. He emphasised that nobody had been more surprised, relieved, and delighted when Blamey returned than had Herring, Vasey, and Steele himself. Steele's candour dispelled the shadows. Blamey's main comment consisted of an expression of astonishment that Robertson should have been the deputation's choice!

Blamey never did exhibit much liking for Robertson, though he admired certain of the red-haired general's military gifts, especially that of transforming raw human material into soldiers of something resembling Guardsmanlike smartness and, even more important, into fighting troops of traditional A.I.F. quality.

However, it is at least suggestive that Robertson's wartime eclipse should have dated from about the time he was proposed for the office of Commander-in-Chief. He was posted to Western Australia early in April, 1942. He did not gain a command beyond the mainland until April, 1945, when he went to New Britain as G.O.C. of the 5th Division.

2

The last days of March and the first days of April were busy ones for Blamey. The Japanese were grouping their forces for a heavy assault on New Guinea, with the objective of capturing Port Moresby and Milne Bay, and thus seizing control of the island. This done, they could have secured naval domination of the Pacific as far south as New Zealand, and knocked Australia out of the war without having to land a single soldier on the mainland.

The forces available to foil Japan's designs were thin. The United States was sending fighting men, and ships, aircraft, and other

weapons of war, to the South-West Pacific, with all speed; but time was dangerously short. It was obvious that, for a year at least, the weight of the land fighting would have to be borne by Australians.

The Australian Army was in no condition for battle. Part of the A.I.F., seasoned in the tricks of soldiering by the Middle East campaigns, was back in Australia, but it needed to undergo a course of training for jungle warfare. Another part of the returning A.I.F. had been diverted, on its journey home, to strengthen the garrison of Ceylon, until more British troops could arrive there six months later. The 1st Armoured Division, which was never to operate as a formation, was training in Western Australia. For the rest, the greater part of the 8th Division had been lost in Malaya, and a fragment of the homecoming A.I.F. in Java, while Morshead's 9th Division was still in the Middle East.

Blamey's command included, also, the compulsorily-enlisted militia forces, in which 211,000 men had been trained for home defence by the end of 1941. Something more than half this number were under arms at the time of Blamey's return. Their qualities as fighting soldiers, though many militia units were later to prove formidable in combat, had still to be tested.

Blamey needed time to do what had to be done. In simple terms, his task was to weld into a coherent fighting force the volunteer A.I.F. and the conscript militia, which were widely scattered in groups of varying size, with little regard to any strategic pattern. One of his first steps was to form the forces into two armies, one under John Lavarack, with headquarters at Toowoomba, Queensland, the other under Iven Mackay, at Balcombe, Victoria.

A need he saw at the outset was to stiffen militia units with battle-tried officers and non-commissioned officers from the A.I.F. The problem was to find enough officers and N.C.O.s to go round without endangering the A.I.F.'s strength. "Promote corporals to lieutenants, if necessary," Blamey ordered.

He also directed a radical re-organisation of his headquarters. No branch of the Staff escaped. By the end of 1942 the transformation had been substantially accomplished: Allied Land Headquarters had become, in large measure, a counterpart of the British War Office. Many of the officers whom Blamey chose for senior Staff posts had held appointments at A.I.F. Headquarters, Middle East. As early as April 7, he sent a radio message to General Morshead, in Cairo, asking him to "consider releasing staff and specialists for return to Australia" at the earliest opportunity. While there were Staff officers of high ability in Australia, they were not nearly numerous enough to fill the multiplicity of key-posts which had to be manned when

the war surged toward Australia's shores. Naturally, Blamey's mind turned, in this hour of need, to the Staff officers who had gained their experience, and proved their quality, while he was leading the A.I.F. in the Middle East.

Time was everything, and there was so little of it. The result of the Coral Sea Battle early in May, which compelled a Japanese invasion force headed for Port Moresby to turn back to Truk and Rabaul, gave him breathing space. The outcome of the Battle of Midway a month later extended the period of reprieve.

Steadily Blamey's forces took shape. At last they began to resemble an army which could give battle, instead of a collection of unrelated fragments. He worked in close consultation with the brilliant, if egocentric, MacArthur, and Lieutenant-General Richard K. Sutherland, MacArthur's Chief of Staff.

Blamey was the only Australian among MacArthur's top commanders. As well as Australian Commander-in-Chief, he had been appointed Commander of Allied Land Forces, a post he was to hold for the rest of the war. Nobody ever detected much evidence of personal liking between Blamey and Sutherland. MacArthur was another matter. His personality impressed Blamey from their first meeting. It was impossible to be unconscious of his dynamism, the range of his mind, his force of character. Blamey was not blind to MacArthur's human defects, nor did he ever surrender himself, as some men did, to MacArthur's imperious will. He was always ready to, and more than once did, fight MacArthur on questions of military principle with all the determination of his nature. But he genuinely admired MacArthur's military gifts and the best of his human qualities. True, he was mildly shocked by the uninhibited character of the claims some of MacArthur's idolators made for him. Suggestions that the Supreme Commander was the custodian of martial genius which made him the equal of Hannibal, Alexander the Great, or Napoleon, or indeed of all three, were hard for a realistic man like Blamey to stomach. Glancing one day through a G.H.Q. pamphlet which discussed MacArthur in some such terms, he remarked, "It's a pity they spoil him with this kind of stuff!" His own estimate of MacArthur was more earthy. His son Tom once asked him, "What is the truth about MacArthur?" Blamey replied, "The best and the worst things you hear about him are both true." It was a judgment that might be applied to many great generals, including Blamey himself.

But Blamey did not have to compromise with his own standards to be able to work as one of MacArthur's chief subordinates. Their collaboration was about as smooth as such a collaboration ever can

be, though they had many differences of opinion, and once or twice clashed in a conflict of wills which could have led to a serious explosion had either man been of lesser fibre. One such excursion on to thin ice occurred in December, 1942, when the Australians and Americans, under General Herring, commanding New Guinea Force, were pressing on Buna and Sanananda. MacArthur directed that a newly arrived regiment of the 41st U.S. Division should be sent to support the 32nd U.S. Division, but Herring wished to use the regiment elsewhere. Blamey sent MacArthur a letter of protest, in which he observed: "I do not for one moment question the right of the Commander-in-Chief to give such orders as he may think fit, but I believe that nothing is more contrary to sound principles of command than that the Commander-in-Chief or the Commander, Allied Land Forces, should take over the personal direction of portion of the battle. This can only result in disturbing the confidence of the inferior commanders."

MacArthur replied at once: "I do not for a moment agree with your view that I am unduly interfering with the local details of the operation. I am in no way attempting to control tactical execution on the front, but am merely strategically advising as to where I believe it would be wise to exert the main effort of the ground forces. I think you will realise from your own long experience that no Commander-in-Chief, present on the field of operations as I am, could have given greater latitude to you or expressed both by word and deed greater confidence in the commanders involved. Complete cordiality, understanding and good will have prevailed between us up to the present, and I cannot but hope that this condition, so essential to success, will be maintained. You have mistaken my advice of yesterday as an arbitrary order. Since my assumption of this command, and throughout its duration, any order that I issue has been, and will be, in written form. My verbal directions are advisory only."

Blamey, with a tact he did not invariably show, chose to ignore the somewhat threatening tone of the letter. He took at face value the assurance that MacArthur had merely offered advice, and told Herring that the disputed American regiment should be used as he had originally planned to use it.

Blamey was by no means to win the day in every dispute he had with MacArthur. But he did win his share of victories. William Frye, in *Marshall: Citizen Soldier*, a biography of General George C. Marshall, the U.S. wartime Chief of Staff, asserts that Blamey was a commander "in whose capacity the Americans found themselves able to place less than complete faith." Frye offers no authority for this statement, and there seems to be no evidence that it represents

the view MacArthur, anyway, held at any period of his military association with Blamey. Australians who were in MacArthur's confidence never heard him speak a word in question of Blamey's capacity as a military commander. He once told Blamey he was a lucky commander—as if there were ever a successful general in whose career luck failed to play a part!

"I don't think it's luck," Blamey replied. "I think it's taking a calculated risk after good reconnaissance, with good officers and good troops. It isn't good luck, but absence of bad luck."

MacArthur did say more than once that Blamey was trying to cover too much ground, that when his presence was required for urgent consultations he was, as often as not, in some far corner of his command. Some Australians, including a few of Blamey's admirers, have made a like criticism. They hold that he should have appointed a deputy, with authority to handle much of the detail of the Commander-in-Chief's post. Blamey did not see it in this light; he preferred to keep all the powers of his office in his own hands.

He resisted several suggestions from Curtin that General Northcott, who became Chief of the General Staff in October, 1942, should be appointed Deputy Commander-in-Chief. Blamey, whether justifiably or not, was characteristically inflexible on this point. His immovability was to be, for as long as the war lasted, a source of complex difficulties, notably for Northcott himself, as Chief of the General Staff, and for the Adjutant-General; and in only slightly smaller measure for the rest of Blamey's Principal Staff Officers. Their tasks were not simplified by Blamey's long absences from Australia. After 1942 he was away, chiefly on some sector of the Pacific battlefront, for periods totalling about seven months of each year. At such times the burden of the bloodless campaign between the Army and Canberra fell, inevitably, upon the Principal Staff Officers. The Chief of the General Staff and the Adjutant-General were, in particular, under more or less constant political fire on questions concerning operations and manpower requirements.

The demand for the return to civil life of men from the Services, especially the Army, intensified as the war lengthened. In the last three years more than 60,000 men were released from the Army alone on War Cabinet directions. This and other forms of wastage, including battle casualties, meant that the Army was losing men at an average rate of between 4,000 and 5,000 *monthly*; yet for one period of twelve months in 1943-44 the Army was being reinforced at a rate of fewer than 8,000 men *a year*. And for one term of a few months the reinforcement rate dropped below 5,000 *a year*. The R.A.A.F. appeared to enjoy a more favoured place in War Cabinet's regard.

At one time, when the Army was fighting for an intake of fewer than 500 men a month, the R.A.A.F. monthly intake was 2,000!

Northcott, and Major-General C. E. M. Lloyd, Adjutant-General, and Lloyd's Deputy, Brigadier F. R. Burton, a patient and indefatigable non-regular soldier, spent much of their working time throughout these years fighting the manpower battle in Canberra, or debating the same prickly subject in Melbourne with the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Army. Their objective was, on the one hand, to prevent the Army from being wasted to a shadow of itself; and, on the other, to protect Blamey from embroilment in dangerously explosive situations with the politicians. It was evidence of their diplomatic skill that they should have succeeded in achieving both ends. It was also evidence of their loyalty to Blamey that they should never have let their efforts flag. Blamey's long absences from Australia enabled him to avoid being drawn into the political vortex, whose discomforts became only too familiar to Northcott, Lloyd, Burton, and the others.

Blamey, with good reason, had complete trust in Northcott, as an accomplished soldier and an unwaveringly loyal subordinate. It is true that he deliberately kept Northcott in ignorance of operational plans, but only because his faith in the discretion of some members of War Cabinet was inconsiderable. His senior officers were under standing instructions not to discuss operational plans when they went south of Brisbane. When new operations were in prospect either MacArthur or Blamey, in person, told Curtin the detail of the plans. Neither believed that such matters should be confided to a wider circle than was absolutely necessary.

Whatever the practical flaws in the centralisation of power in one man's hands, Blamey had an extraordinary mastery of detail. His gift of swift analysis was uncanny, his memory phenomenal. He never forgot a face, and nearly always he could identify the face with its owner's name—and, in the Army, with its owner's unit also. He met a young A.I.F. officer named Green early in the war. Two years later their paths crossed again:

"Ah," said Blamey, "you're one of the colour boys! Which is it, Brown or Green? Green, I believe."

He never forgot the essential detail of any document which had been before him, even years earlier. It was photographed on his freakish memory, and filed away to be brought to light at need.

It was not true that he would refuse, or even that he disliked, to change any decision he had given. He once said, "Nobody but a bloody fool"—and "bloody" was a strong word for Blamey, who rarely used any oral embellishment more forceful than "My good-

ness!"—"would ask me to reverse a decision." What he meant was that nothing would induce him to alter a decision he had given on the basis of *all the evidence*. If after he had given a ruling someone produced a new factor, he would say, "I hadn't considered that. That alters the whole thing." Then he would re-examine the facts, and if necessary reverse his decision.

Early in 1944, in New Guinea operations, Colonel (later Brigadier) Kenneth Wills, then Deputy Director of Military Intelligence on New Guinea Force Headquarters, had a detachment of men operating at the junction of the Fly and Yellow Rivers. Their ability to stay there depended on the ability of the Air Force to supply them and do some diversionary bombing on chosen targets. Wills wanted the men to stay there; one of his superiors on Force Headquarters considered they should be taken out. The question was referred to Blamey, who decided they should stay. Within a week the circumstances changed. The Air Force had other commitments; it could no longer give the required support. Wills felt it would be impracticable to maintain the detachment, so he reopened the matter with the senior officer who had come into the earlier discussion.

"Well," said this officer, "the Old Man has given his decision, and nobody but an ass would go back and ask him to change his mind. However, he'll be back here in a day or two. I'm not going to ask him, but you can ask him if you like."

"I shall," said Wills.

He did. Blamey said at once: "Yes, of course. Bring them out."

The charge that Blamey would tolerate nobody on his staff but sycophants who did not threaten his hold on the throne is easy to make, but hard to prove. Of course, the men about him were known for their loyalty to him. Is the creation of a loyal staff evidence of eccentricity or wickedness in a man fighting a war? It has been a custom of military leaders down the ages to have about them only officers they can trust. And Blamey was willing to take chances with able men. When he proposed to fill a senior post by appointing a certain officer, one of his trusted advisers told him:

"He'll sell you the minute it suits him."

"I know," Blamey replied. "But that's my risk."

He knew the strength and weakness, the faults and the merits, of every officer about him. Someone once asked him if he considered a certain senior officer, whose methods of achieving an end were at times devious, to be an honest man.

"Well," said Blamey, "he's honest in his ultimate aims."

He had one guiding principle: half-measures don't succeed in war. There were no half-measures about Blamey the soldier, or Blamey the

man. He would fight his enemies to the death, and fight to the death for his friends. This did not mean that his friends escaped the lash of his tongue or pen when they committed some act of folly. One of his senior officers whom Blamey both liked and admired, wrote an account, for study within the Army, of a certain Pacific operation. He had reached his conclusions on the evidence of reports which had come to him at a base hundreds of miles from the scene of the fighting, and Blamey was livid when he read them. He at once dictated a letter to the author of the paper:

"I . . . can imagine the bitter anger of the officers and troops who took part when this critical examination reaches them. It is almost a classical example of the Armchair Critic, and it completely fails to grasp the conditions under which the operation was carried out, and draws its lessons with a fireside smugness accordingly.

"Although it is most desirable that lessons that can be applied to jungle training should be drawn at the earliest possible date, this critical attitude of a Headquarters far removed from the scene of operations shows no very great imaginative conception for the task which the troops were set, and can do nothing but harm. . . .

"I regard this paper as a most unfortunate production."

If you served under Blamey you had to be prepared to swallow such robust criticism. He wrote letters of this kind with no personal ill-will to the recipient. They were merely a facet of the methods he used to build an efficient army.

There was a great depth of kindliness in him for men he liked. Whispers reached him that a certain senior commander was spending more time in premature celebration of victory than in supervising the training of his troops. Blamey wrote to him:

"As you know, we all have enemies. We never quite know where they are; sometimes they are internal, sometimes they are external. I am taking a very great liberty in conveying certain information to you written to me in very strict confidence by a very great friend of yours. A statement has been made to him by two people whom he regards as reliable. To use the words of one of them, 'you are giving the bottle a real hiding, and on occasions your actions recently have been very indiscreet.'

"The same individual also said that 'apparently a rapid decline is taking place in your prestige and an increased lack of respect among senior officers under your command.' From the sources from which they came I greatly fear that the rumours may spread. Beyond the anxiety of our mutual friend that you should be forewarned, I have no other knowledge.

"I hope that you will not take this letter amiss, and I beg of you to

believe that it is done solely because of my anxiety in your well-being."

Blamey also had enemies. It was a measure of his stature that they did not succeed in unseating him. It was also a measure of his guiltlessness of, anyway, the grossest of the sins popularly laid at his door. Proof of any of these would have been enough to bring him down.

It was fashionable for Australians, inside and outside the Army, to grumble: "Why don't they sack Blamey and put someone else in his place?", as if it were merely a matter of naming any one of six or seven candidates and telling the selected man to take over. The best answer to this question was given by Arthur Calwell, Curtin's Minister of Information. He and Blamey were at bitter variance at least once during the war, but Calwell, a master of pyrotechnic phrase, routed one of Blamey's critics with the words:

"The next man to Blamey is as a curate to an archbishop!"

3

The evolution of a working arrangement which would protect Blamey against intolerable restriction, and the Australian people against intolerable encroachment on their rights was not easy.

Frank Sinclair, Secretary of the Army Department, foresaw the problems ahead when Forde, Minister of the Army, sent for him in Canberra in March, 1942, and told him the Government was in the act of abolishing the Military Board and appointing Blamey Commander-in-Chief.

"What is his charter?" Sinclair asked.

"He's seen the Prime Minister and had a talk with him," said Forde, "but I don't know what his charter is."

"Well," said Sinclair. "I think it is very important for him to have a charter to define what he is entitled to do."

Forde sent for Sinclair again next day.

"I'm sorry to tell you," he said, "that the P.M. has told Blamey he can write his own ticket."

The sweeping powers thus placed in Blamey's hands, and by inference in the hands of certain officers about him, were the root cause of the long struggle which was to develop between, on the one side, the Army and, on the other, the men, notably Forde and Sinclair, who had the obligation of exercising control over the Army in the higher spheres of non-military administration, notably that of financial expenditure. This struggle was to be remembered as the Battle of the Barracks, or, as some preferred it, Red Tabs v. Frock Coats.

A detailed examination of the series of wordy conflicts which occurred before a working arrangement was evolved would be merely

tedious. The issue was simple: Should Sinclair, as civil head of the Army Department, be responsible to the Minister for the Army's spending of public money, or should financial control be exercised by an Army officer responsible to Blamey, as Commander-in-Chief.

Sinclair had been transferred from the post of Assistant Secretary of the Defence Department to become Secretary of the Army in 1941. He had rejected earlier invitations to take the appointment, but at last Menzies, then Prime Minister, had told him: "I am transferring your body to the Army. I have no control over your soul." Now, with the Military Board abolished and a commander-in-chief in the saddle, Sinclair found it necessary to search his soul. For a challenge to Sinclair's right to exercise financial control came almost at once, not from Blamey, but from certain of his administrative officers. They argued, with some justification, in view of the looseness of the terms of Blamey's appointment, that he was the supreme ruler, not only of the fighting forces, but of the whole Department of the Army. He, or the men to whom he chose to delegate authority, were empowered, they said, in effect, to determine how, when, and where money should be spent, without having to ask permission of some public servant who didn't even wear the King's uniform.

Such a situation had never before arisen in Australia's short history, so there was no Australian precedent to enable an easy solution to be reached. But the exercise of financial control by a commander-in-chief was directly opposed to British War Office practice. Any democratic government that granted it would have been abdicating rights it had no business to surrender. At least, that was the citadel that the Frock Coats had to defend. The Red Tabs, or many of them, saw the problem from another standpoint. They argued that military officers holding key military posts should be armed with authority, including financial authority, commensurate with their responsibilities, and replaced if they abused this authority. The inhibitions imposed by the Frock Coats tended, said the Red Tabs, to make the uniformed Army officer an impotent figurehead. And the Government, they averred, had failed to accept its obligations; instead, it had chosen to delegate authority over the Army to boards, committees and other advisers, who had no direct responsibility for the efficient working of the Army, nor adequate knowledge of its requirements.

After the war the nine most senior officers of the Corps of Royal Australian Engineers, who had served both at Army Headquarters and in the field, wrote a brochure entitled *Some Lessons from the War 1939-45*. This brochure contained the following passage, which does much to explain the Red Tabs' view of the conflict: "The greatest problems in stores procurement were the delay, waste of time, frus-

tration of effort and exasperation caused by cumbersome government and civil service procedures and regulations. The military officers responsible for supplying the troops did not have proper authority to procure stores. Funds were made available only after the military requirement had been approved by a succession of civil and departmental authorities outside the Army. These authorities, who had little knowledge of military requirements and no direct responsibility to the troops, had the power of veto and delay, and had to be convinced that the service need existed. Towards the end of the war, when the danger to Australia had passed, the position became increasingly difficult; for instance, in March, 1945, the Treasury instructed the Department of Munitions to the effect that, with military requirements, cost was to be the prime consideration but that, under special conditions, at the discretion of the *Department of Munitions*, factors such as suitability, quality and time of delivery could be considered."

Clearly, the task of reconciling two viewpoints so fundamentally different as those of the Frock Coats and the Red Tabs was one to tax the powers of a latter-day Solomon. It was two years before the dispute was finally settled, in Sinclair's favour.

The Battle of the Barracks, which was fought without the knowledge of any but a handful of Australians, all but resulted in splitting the Department of the Army into two irreconcilable factions—the Red Tabs on one side, the Frock Coats on the other. The fact that it did not do so may be attributed to the good sense of Blamey and the patience of Sinclair.

A curious aspect of the dispute was that Sinclair never found any doubt in Blamey's own mind where his authority ended.

"I don't want financial control," he told Sinclair in the first days after he was appointed Commander-in-Chief.

However, in his preoccupation with other, and more pressing, duties, Blamey accepted advice which represented Sinclair as a power-hungry public servant who wished to establish himself as a dictator of Army affairs. There is not an iota of evidence that Sinclair ever cherished such an ambition. The essence of his case was expressed in a memorandum he sent to the Minister of the Army on October 18, 1943, in which he said:

"Corruption and extravagance is, unfortunately, inherent in every community, and for the Army or Governmental Authorities to maintain that it did not exist in some form or another in the Army today would merely be to delude the Parliament and the people. No matter how soundly based are our Army systems or how efficient is its

organisation or administration, the human element is the final and deciding factor. . . .

"For such reasons . . . and not for any reason or doubt as to the integrity or capacity of men in uniform as against men in civilian clothes, I have consistently maintained that there must be independent control, under direct Ministerial authority, to ensure the regularity of the activities of the Army relating to the expenditure of public funds, either in money or stores on which such money has been expended."

Nearly a year before this memorandum was written, Curtin, Forde, and Chifley, the Treasurer, had conferred with Blamey on a number of points concerning his powers. Blamey had agreed then that Sinclair, as Secretary of the Army, should exercise control over the higher finance organisation. Blamey himself never challenged this agreement, but within a year it was challenged at a conference between a group of his senior officers and Sinclair.

"Have you the C.-in-C.'s authority for this?" Sinclair asked.

"Yes," said the spokesman of the Red Tabs.

Sinclair reported the discussion to Forde, who referred it to Curtin. Curtin ruled that the agreement which gave Sinclair financial control must stand.

Blamey saw Sinclair a few days later.

"You have been very unfair to me," he said. "You have misreported my views."

"You were away, sir," Sinclair told him. "I merely reported what your people told me."

"Well," Blamey said, "I wasn't aware of the proposal."

It was Sinclair's experience throughout the dispute that certain of Blamey's uniformed advisers, not Blamey himself, were the authors of the effort to gain financial control of the Army's affairs. On one occasion he showed Blamey a paper which proposed that the Army should take over the whole of the functions of internal audit.

"Did I say that?" Blamey asked.

"Well, sir, it's signed for you," Sinclair told him. The document was signed by Lieut.-General H. D. Wynter, Lieut.-General in Charge of Administration. "And you certainly ratified it."

"Then I repudiate it," Blamey said.

Blamey certainly insisted that the Army must have wide freedom in the spending of public money. "There is nothing so costly as a lost battle, and nothing so disastrous as a lost war, and the Army is bound to keep in view the possibility of such occurring," he once wrote in a letter to Forde, when the subject of financial control was under debate. This was eminently reasonable. Neither Forde nor

Sinclair ever wilfully sought to deny the Army such liberty. In fact, Blamey would not have tolerated interference that might have imperilled the Army's ability to wage successful war.

He did not thank subordinates to come grizzling to him about difficulties they met in breaking down obstacles raised by the Secretariat or anybody else; he expected them to surmount such obstacles for themselves. On some few occasions, when a vital item of expenditure was challenged and a delay which might have had serious military consequences was threatened, Blamey went into action with all his heavy artillery blazing. In such circumstances, there was one man whom he could turn to with sure knowledge that he would not appeal in vain: John Curtin. On financial matters Blamey rarely had to use his right of direct access to Curtin. He never did use it without ensuring that he had an ironclad case to present. It was never Blamey's way to act in any matter unless he was certain that his ground was firm.

Though Blamey was aligned with the Red Tabs against the Frock Coats in this battle, all the evidence suggests that he allowed himself to be so involved because he placed too much reliance on the judgment of some of his advisers, and failed to understand the implications of their proposals. When he did see the implications, he immediately withdrew his support.

Much has been made of a reputed animosity between Blamey and Forde. They certainly collided, but their collisions, as in the dispute over financial control of the Army, were impersonal. These were impacts between two captains of different teams, not flarings of personal antagonism. It is true that they were impatient of each other at times. Blamey was irritated by Forde's slowness in understanding military esoterics: he found very trying the Minister's practice of "obtaining expert military advice from non-military sources." Forde was no less exasperated, on his side, by Blamey's occasional failures to realise that under a system of Parliamentary Government the Minister of the Army must, even in time of war, be able to justify every action of his department to Parliament. Far from cherishing any dark antipathy for Forde, Blamey had a genuine, if faintly wondering, admiration for the immense kindliness of heart which impelled the busy Minister to spend many of what should have been leisure hours in persuading such persons as crackpot inventors of Secret Weapons that their devices weren't really the war-winners their authors believed them to be.

Blamey's enemies were wont to say that he had all the instincts of a military dictator. The charge will not bear examination. In the later years of the war Mr. Justice (Norman) O'Bryan, of the Victorian

Supreme Court, was enlisted as an honorary part-time member of the Army Department's staff. His duties were to advise the Minister on the effect of Army activities on the civil population. Sinclair broke the news to Blamey.

"That's wonderful!" Blamey exclaimed.

"But," replied Sinclair, "he's here to protect the Minister from you."

"It's high time," said Blamey. ". . . Do you mind if we use him, too?"

It was hardly the remark of a man who wished to substitute military for civil authority, and establish the Army as a second, and autonomous, government in Australia.

4

It is easy to see the first four months after Blamey assumed command-in-chief of the Australian Military Forces as a period of lull in the Pacific war. It was no lull, but a time in which both sides gathered strength for the next phase—Japan putting in order her extended lines of communication, the U.S. and Australia grouping, training and equipping their forces.

The wounds Japan suffered in the Coral Sea and Midway battles, the damage inflicted by American and Australian air bombardment on enemy concentrations in New Britain and New Ireland, delayed the development of her plans. But Japan still held the initiative, and early in July she used it to extend her islands front by landing substantial forces at Guadalcanal, in the Solomons, and at Buna, on the north coast of Papua. A month later the U.S. Marines opened the grim struggle to reconquer the Solomons when they swarmed ashore at Guadalcanal and Tulagi. Farther west MacArthur and Blamey were simultaneously grouping their forces for the Battle of Papua.

The enemy's objective in New Guinea was the capture of Port Moresby. It was to fall, in the Japanese Command's calendar, on September 21, under the assault of forces advancing from the north, over the Owen Stanley Range, and from the east, after Milne Bay had been captured and transformed into an enemy base.

The "gazelles in a dell" were nervous—though no more nervous than the people of any land would be with a savage and ruthless enemy sharpening his bayonet almost within earshot. Apparently it *could* happen here, after all! In a matter of weeks or months a soldier of the Mikado might burst through your front door, slit your throat, and rape your wife! And what was the Government doing to prevent it? What was this fellow Blamey about? There were whispers, which sometimes mounted to the level of shouts, that Blamey spent all his time sitting in a swivel-chair at the barracks. It was nonsense,

of course. As soon as he had made arrangements to ensure that the defensive pattern he had prescribed would be followed, he was constantly on the move.

Since he had no plane of his own he travelled with some difficulty, using civil airlines, or sometimes an aircraft borrowed from Broken Hill Proprietary. He explored the strategic areas of New South Wales, Queensland, and Western Australia, running the legs off his personal assistants. He was in and out of Canberra. In Melbourne he spent many hours each week with MacArthur.

Late in May, he made an intensive reconnaissance of North Queensland. In Townsville he saw Major-General Basil Morris, then commanding New Guinea Force. What he saw, and what he heard from the realistic Morris of the prospects of holding New Guinea with the force then in the island, gave him little comfort. On his way south he met Forde in Sydney and told him that the time might be near when civilians would have to be evacuated from northern areas of Australia.

Blamey continued to go about his affairs with outward stolidity when the Japanese launched their attack on New Guinea, and the Australian retreat down the Kokoda Trail began. It was no time for panic. He had laid his plans. Now they were to be tried by the only true test: Battle.

It was while he was busy with the problem of saving Australia from defeat that Blamey was subjected to about the most piddling example of irritation ever imposed on a man in such a position. He left Canberra for Melbourne in a civil airliner on August 5, accompanied by one of his officers. Their seats were separated, and Blamey's companion wished to sit with him to discuss Army business. A R.A.A.F. aircraftman in the seat beside Blamey refused to move. The air hostess intervened, and ruled in favour of the aircraftman. Blamey, knowing Australia's difficulty in finding enough aircraft for essential purposes, had until then resisted suggestions that he should insist on having a plane for his own use. Now he demanded that the Government should find him such a plane. The Government gave him a R.A.A.F. Hudson. He made his first trip in it a week after the contretemps above Canberra. It was within an ace of being his last trip in that aircraft or any other.

The Hudson, piloted by Flying Officer (later Squadron Leader) W. G. Upjohn, who was to fly Blamey on many missions, left Laverton at 2.30 in the afternoon bound for Sydney. Soon after the take-off, Upjohn called Carlyon forward and pointed out that the motors were icing up.

"You'd better tell the C.-in-C. I'm turning back," Upjohn said.

Blamey had an almost superstitious dislike of postponing a journey once begun.

"Let him have a try for a while," he told Carlyon.

It was an unforgettable flight. The plane, shut in by walls of cloud, lurched and bucketed. One jolt snapped the forward moorings of Blamey's seat, which tipped over. Blamey lay on his back on the floor, with his legs in the air. Carlyon started unbuckling his seat belt to go to Blamey's aid, but Upjohn frantically signalled him not to move, while Blamey lay on the floor waving a hand to indicate he was quite comfortable.

Suddenly the Hudson flew out of the clouds into clear daylight. The plane was low, and there was a hill on each side of it. By some good chance it was travelling down the line of a valley near Sale, on the Victorian coast a hundred-odd miles east of Melbourne. It must have been dangerously close to a crack-up in the mountains it had passed.

Such incidents provided a kind of comic relief—anyway, comic after the event—to the grimness of the preliminaries for the Battle of Papua.

There was one bright spot in the darkness. The Japanese sent an amphibious force to seize Milne Bay, as a base for an attack to be launched on Port Moresby simultaneously with the thrust through the Owen Stanleys. In fighting between August 25 and September 6, A.I.F. and militia forces, under Major-General C. A. Clowes, smashed the attempt. It was an omen of what was to come. It was also an answer, the only effective answer, to American officers on MacArthur's staff who were saying: "The Australians can't fight and won't fight!" —a natural enough view for soldiers of one foreign ally to take of the soldiers of another when things are going badly. Blamey did not heed these American murmurs. He had commanded Australian soldiers in two wars. He knew their fighting quality. He remained calm, even when there was an atmosphere little short of panic in some quarters.

He received a letter from Forde on September 9. It said:

"The progress of the Japanese through the pass of the Owen Stanley Ranges in the vicinity of Kokoda is seriously viewed by members of the War Council, and there is some apprehension whether the Army is doing everything possible to prevent this progress.

"The view was expressed today by several members of the War Council that it was advisable for you to make a special visit to Moresby to confer with General Rowell and ensure that everything is being done to render it impossible for the Japanese to make further progress across country to Port Moresby.

"I discussed the position with the Prime Minister afterwards, and he left the matter with me to contact you with a view to your giving your immediate consideration to a flight to Moresby to enable you to confer with General Rowell as to the strategy and report to the next meeting of the War Council."

The overall defence of New Guinea at this time was under the direction of Lieutenant-General Rowell, who was commanding New Guinea Force. Blamey had never shown any lack of faith in Rowell's military ability. As lately as August 17 he had written to Rowell: "I am perfectly confident that you and your staff and your troops will handle the big responsibility that has been laid on you very adequately, and both myself and the Government have every confidence in the result." But the terms of Forde's letter gave him no alternative. So, on September 12, he flew to Port Moresby. He conferred with Rowell, called on 7th Division headquarters, inspected hospital arrangements. He and Rowell parted on good terms when he flew back to Brisbane two days later. It was to be the last time that even a pretence of friendship was to exist between them.

12

THE ROWELL AFFAIR

1

"I'M leaving for New Guinea in a few days," Blamey told Burston, his Director-General of Medical Services, on September 18.

"Why?" Burston asked. "Are you worried about New Guinea?"

"No," said Blamey, "but Canberra's lost it!"

They were talking in Blamey's office in Victoria Barracks, Melbourne. Blamey had just had talks on the secraphone with both Curtin and MacArthur. Each of them had instructed him to go to New Guinea.

"I remember what happened to the Auk in the desert, and I'm off," he told Burston. He was referring to Auchinleck's displacement from the post of Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, after the disasters in Cyrenaica earlier in 1942. "I think highly of Rowell, and I'm satisfied he has the situation under control, but I feel I must go."

Burston, who wished to inspect medical units in New Guinea, suggested he should accompany Blamey. Blamey agreed. Perhaps he foresaw even then that he might need Burston as a mediator. For he feared that Rowell would resent his appearance in New Guinea, somewhat in the guise of a military messiah who had come to save a desperate situation. He did not see himself in this light: he was simply obeying an order of the Government. To have ignored it, he believed, would have cost him his post.

Blamey had freely expressed confidence in Rowell to the War Cabinet, and publicly in a nation-wide broadcast on September 16. It was not enough. Curtin and MacArthur had discussed the crisis in Papua. Then they had ordered Blamey to Port Moresby to take personal command. He left Melbourne next day for Brisbane, where he had his Advanced Headquarters. There he made his final preparations, which included a personal discussion with MacArthur.

Blamey knew he had been criticised in Canberra, and by the public at large, for spending most of his time on the Australian mainland instead of with the forces in the field. The implication of these whispers was that he was gun-shy. Such criticism was the product of ignorance. It is not a commander-in-chief's function to lead the combat troops,

but to see that his tactical commanders have the men and material they require for the winning of battles. But Australia had never before had a wartime commander-in-chief. Perhaps the Government's, and the public's, misconception of Blamey's duties was excusable.

He wrote a letter explaining the situation, and sent it to Rowell by the hands of an *aide-de-camp*, Captain R. E. Porter. Porter flew from Brisbane to Port Moresby two days ahead of Blamey, and delivered the letter to Rowell at his headquarters.

"Do you know what is in this?" Rowell asked Porter when he had read the letter.

"I have an idea, sir," Porter said.

Rowell nodded and dismissed him.

Blamey's letter said:

"The powers that be have determined that I shall myself go to New Guinea for a while and operate from there. I do not, however, propose to transfer many of Adv. H.Q. staff, and will arrive by aeroplane Wednesday evening. . . . At present I propose to bring with me only my P.A., Major Carlyon, two extra cipher officers, and Lieut. Lawson [Lieutenant Keith Lawson, Blamey's personal clerk]. I hope you will be able to house us in your camp and messes.

"I hope you will not be upset at this decision, and will not think that it implies any lack of confidence in yourself. I think it arises out of the fact that we have very inexperienced politicians who are inclined to panic on every possible occasion, and I think the relationship between us personally is such that we can make the arrangement work without any difficulty."

Blamey was conscious of the breakers ahead, but his letter to Rowell held no more than a hint of it.

2

He left Brisbane for New Guinea in a U.S. service aircraft at 6.30 a.m. on September 23. As well as a small personal staff, he was accompanied by Burston, and Brigadier (later Major-General) R. N. L. Hopkins, who was going to Port Moresby to become Rowell's chief of staff.

On the trip he chatted with Burston. He often gave Burston confidences that he would have entrusted to no other Army officer; their relationship was that of a man and his medical adviser, rather than that of commander-in-chief and subordinate officer.

"You know," he told Burston, "I feel Rowell might think I've gone up to steal his thunder, just as he's getting everything under control. But one thing is certain! If he plays, he won't lose by it."

Rowell met the plane at the Port Moresby airfield that afternoon.

Blamey's apprehensions had not been fanciful. Rowell appeared far from pleased at Blamey's intervention when the battle was rising to a point of crisis. This meeting was the first of a series of events which led to the ugliest controversy to arise in the Australian Army throughout the war. Factions, which were to dispute the merits of the affair long after it was officially closed, formed behind each man. The Rowell faction saw Blamey as the villain, the Blamey faction gave the villain's crown to Rowell.

A sober examination of the circumstances suggests that neither Blamey nor Rowell was the villain. They were two men, each proud, each uncommonly resolute, who found themselves at cross purposes on a question of military principle. Neither would surrender, and inevitably Blamey won the struggle. He had to win it, or abdicate as Commander-in-Chief. If there was a villain in the affair, it was the War Cabinet which directed Blamey to go to New Guinea. War Cabinet did not, of course, foresee the consequences of its act. Had it done so, it might have averted an upheaval which was to cut deep scars on the minds and reputations of the two chief actors and create within the Army two distinct camps—the Blamey men and the anti-Blamey men.

General George C. Kenney, who was MacArthur's Commander of Allied Air Forces—that is, Blamey's counterpart on the air side of South-West Pacific operations—published in 1949 a book of war reminiscences, *General Kenney Reports*. Describing his recollections of a call he claimed to have made on Rowell in New Guinea in September, 1942, Kenney wrote: "I believed that Rowell's attitude had become defeatist and that this attitude had permeated the whole Australian force in New Guinea."

Nobody who knew Rowell accepted the story that he was ever defeatist, or that defeatism was the cause of his dismissal by Blamey. Nobody who knows him accepts it now. Any such conclusion is refuted by documentary evidence—for example, an exchange of letters between Rowell and General Sutherland, MacArthur's Chief of Staff, in August.

At MacArthur's instigation, Sutherland wrote to Rowell on August 13 proposing that "necessary reconnaissance be made of critical areas on the trail through the Owen Stanley Range for the selection of points where the pass may be readily blocked by demolition, and that the necessary charges be emplaced in the most forward areas and assembled for ready installation at the rear areas." MacArthur and Sutherland evidently believed that the Kokoda Trail was a kind of narrow mountain defile which could be effectively stoppered against the enemy at the cost of a few sticks of gelignite.

Rowell replied to Sutherland on August 22:

". . . It is submitted that the amount of explosive which could be carried by native porters for the five days' trip at present needed to reach the top of the Owen Stanley Range would hardly increase the present difficulties of the track. Some parts of the track have to be negotiated on hands and knees, and the use of some tons of explosives would not increase these difficulties. It is respectfully suggested that such explosives as can be got forward would be better employed in facilitating our advance, than for preparing to delay the enemy! ! !"

These were not the words of a commander labouring under an attack of "defeatism."

It may be that Rowell behaved with less flexibility than a commander-in-chief who had been ordered into the field could permit to a subordinate. But there is nothing in the record of those days to suggest that he was defeatist. The rupture between him and Blamey was born of entirely different reasons. The coolness which had developed between these two in Greece was not spawned by mischance. It was a product of the impact upon one another under stress of two antipathetic characters; for Blamey and Rowell had little in common, except the fact that each had been trained for a professional soldier's career. However, there had been no open breach. Indeed, after Greece, Blamey had written to General Sturdee, on June 26, 1941:

"Rowell has very great ability: is quick in decision and sound in judgment. There can be no question of his personal courage, but he lacks the reserves of nervous energy over a period of long strain."

The fact that Rowell advanced in rank from colonel on the A.I.F.'s formation to lieutenant-general in less than three years is substantial evidence of Blamey's admiration of his military gifts, as well as the existence of the gifts themselves.

There was good reason why the lack of sympathy between the two men had not found active expression in the year and a half since they had left Greece together: it had had no real chance to do so. Soon after the end of the Syria campaign in 1941 Rowell had returned to Australia to become Deputy Chief of the General Staff. Blamey, who was then Auchinleck's deputy, was conscious of Rowell's satisfaction at passing out of the arena of his immediate influence. "I think Rowell will like that," he remarked to one of his Middle East officers, with a faint smile.

Now, in Port Moresby, they faced each other in circumstances which meant that the long-standing tension in their relationship had reached breaking-point.

3

Blamey moved into a tent on high ground above Rowell's headquarters. He sent radio messages to Curtin and MacArthur telling them he had assumed command from six o'clock on the evening of September 23.

He and Rowell had a long talk that night. It was frank; at times acrimonious. Rowell believed Blamey's coming to New Guinea indicated want of confidence in his ability to command the forces facing the Japanese. Since Blamey had brought no staff with him, Rowell could hardly have been unaware that he was in danger of being reduced, in fact, if not in name, to the status of a glorified chief of staff, whose influence on the course of the battle would be insignificant.

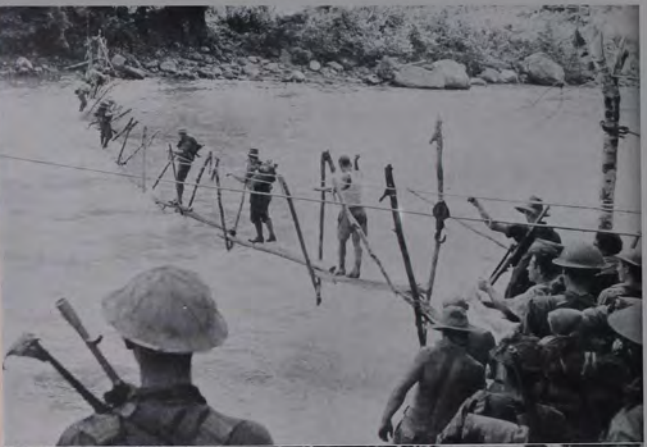
They tried to find a basis on which they could work together. Blamey suggested that Rowell should act as his deputy field commander. Rowell would not accept this proposal. To have done so, he felt, would have been to strip himself of all powers of command. He proposed that Blamey should establish an Army headquarters to control the New Guinea operations in general, and exercise detailed control of Milne Bay and commando units at Wau. Rowell and his own staff would have operated under this headquarters, directing the defence of Port Moresby and the operations in the Owen Stanleys. But Blamey would not agree.

In terms of strict military etiquette, Rowell was undoubtedly justified in pressing the point; but Blamey held that the introduction of an Army headquarters into New Guinea was unjustified at a time when Japan's fingers were almost on Australia's throat. Transport was desperately short, every ounce of supplies was precious. The strain on both transport and supplies would have been substantially increased by the transfer from the mainland of the human material required to create an Army headquarters—at a conservative estimate, a hundred officers and three hundred and fifty men. Such a headquarters, Blamey decided, would have been redundant when the need of the moment was to smash the Japanese advance on Port Moresby.

Blamey and Rowell ended their discussion with nothing settled. When they met again next morning, the current of disharmony was still running strongly. The crucial moment of the battle for Port Moresby was approaching. At Milne Bay Clowes' men were in control, and cock-a-hoop after their recent victory; but on the Kokoda front units of the 7th Division were at desperate grips with the enemy. Port Moresby itself was screened by fighting patrols ready to meet any attempted sorties by Japanese suicide squads.

That evening Blamey sent for Burston, and asked him to have a

Wet crossing, New Guinea



TOP: *Catwalk, New Guinea*

BELOW: *Stretcher-case, New Guinea*

friendly talk with Rowell. Burston and Rowell were both South Australians, and had been friends for many years. If any man could save the situation from deteriorating to the point of explosion, Blamey felt, Burston was the man. Burston saw Rowell, and they talked for a long time. Burston was able to appreciate the reason of Rowell's suspicion that Blamey had come to the front to seize the glory of repelling the Japanese assault, when all the groundwork had already been done by Rowell's own headquarters. But Burston, knowing that Blamey had been ordered to Papua by War Cabinet, felt himself obliged to advise Rowell that "the only thing for you to do is play, and play as if it was the one thing you were looking for."

Burston left Rowell hoping, but not convinced, that his words had fallen on fertile ground.

Blamey flew down to Milne Bay next morning. He inspected troop dispositions, and had a long talk with Brigadier (later Major-General) George Wootten, commanding the 18th Brigade. Then he conferred with Clowes about the chief purpose of his visit—the sending of a detachment to seize Wanigela Mission, midway between Milne Bay and Buna, which offered a good natural landing field for aircraft.

When he returned to Moresby in the afternoon he found that news of his conference with Clowes had preceded him. Rowell did not applaud Blamey's action in having given Clowes orders about the Wanigela project. Blamey insisted that his words were not an order, but a suggestion—perhaps a distinction without a difference when the speaker is a wartime commander-in-chief.

That night Blamey's hackles began to rise. He had seen no situation report—the collection of essential information on which a military commander decides his tactical dispositions—on the day of his arrival or on his second day in Port Moresby, though he had sent Carlyon to see that he was placed on the distribution list. Now, on the third day, no situation report had reached him. But he still wished to avoid a definitive clash. He again asked Burston to see Rowell. Burston found that Rowell's attitude had not mellowed since their earlier meeting. After they had talked for some time Rowell agreed to do nothing precipitate until he had sought the advice of Lieutenant-General H. D. Wynter, one of Australia's most distinguished Staff Corps officers. Wynter, then Lieutenant-General in Charge of Administration at Land Headquarters, Melbourne, was highly esteemed by Staff Corps officers in general for his calm and penetrating judgment. Rowell sat down and wrote a letter to Wynter which he handed to Burston. But the Blamey-Rowell conflict was to be over before the letter could reach Wynter's hands.

Next morning Blamey had an official letter from Rowell. This

detailed Rowell's authority as commander of New Guinea Force and ended: "It would now appear that this authority should pass to you and that fresh delegations be made to replace those already issued to me." Blamey did not reply, but that evening he sent Rowell a directive:

"I have been directed by the Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief, South-West Pacific Area, to take control of the forces in the New Guinea area.

"For the present it does not appear necessary or desirable to set up an additional headquarters staff. Therefore I propose to exercise command through yourself and the present staff.

"I will be glad if you will direct that arrangements are made to furnish me promptly with all tactical and other information and alterations in the functions, allocations, dispositions and location of troops.

"I will be glad if you will ensure that all messages and information for Headquarters Allied Land Forces or Headquarters Australian Military Forces are submitted to me, including Situation Reports, before dispatch.

"In the event of my absence from Headquarters, where it is apparent that such absence would cause undue delay in furnishing such information, you will forward it direct, at the same time taking such action as is necessary to ensure that I am kept fully informed.

"The above applies also to matters of administration of any importance. . . ."

Rowell saw Blamey again that night, and they were able to agree on at least one point of a working arrangement: they would meet at nine each morning to discuss matters of major policy.

Their conference on the first morning, September 27, went off with a semblance of surface calm. But that afternoon incidents occurred which caused Blamey to decide, rightly or wrongly, that he was being obstructed in his efforts to exercise the powers of command. An Intelligence document was delayed some hours in reaching him, and he had some trouble in obtaining a copy of the New Guinea Force battle order.

The night was hot and steamy. Blamey sat outside his tent with Carlyon, both huddled under mosquito nets, until two in the morning. He talked on and on, trying to analyse Rowell's thoughts.

"Rowell must know I'm going to take some action," he said.

He told Carlyon he could not understand Rowell's refusal to accept the situation. He spoke of his admiration for Rowell's personal character and military *flair*, of their days together as G.O.C. and Chief of Staff. For a second while he talked tears sprang to his eyes.

He was in full control of his emotions when Rowell reported to him for the nine o'clock conference next morning. He told Rowell he had decided to relieve him of his command, and had sent an adverse report on him to Curtin and MacArthur. Rowell saw and initialled a copy of the report radioed to Curtin and MacArthur by Blamey. His initialling of the report did not signify agreement with the terms of it; the action was merely a record of the fact that he had seen the document. The report stated:

"On my arrival here I informed General Rowell of my instructions from the Prime Minister and C.-in-C. S.W.P.A. He proved most difficult and recalcitrant, considering himself very unjustly used. I permitted him to state his case with great frankness. It was mainly a statement of grievances primarily against myself . . . He charged me with having failed to safeguard his interests, and said he felt he was being made to eat dirt. All my persuasion could not make him see matters realistically. . . . Instead of setting out full information for me here, I have had to search out details and feel a definite atmosphere of obstruction. I was forced to give Rowell written orders defining position. Atmosphere now completely strained. Although I have exercised great patience, it is quite obvious that, as Rowell has taken my coming here as personal against himself, he would be seriously disruptive influence if retained here. Moreover, am not satisfied that necessary energy, foresight, and drive is being put into certain activities. Rowell is competent, but of a temperament that harbours imaginary grievances. He has had very limited experience of command. Essential to have commander of cheerful temperament and who is prepared to co-operate to the limit. . . ."

Rowell, in a later report, expressed regret that, in Blamey's message to Curtin and MacArthur, "two statements made in the heat of the moment should have been divorced from their context and made to appear as the only points raised in three very long discussions." He also pointed out that he had received no written instructions on procedure until three days after Blamey's arrival at Port Moresby.

"Once these instructions were issued," he observed, "I was determined to do my best to make the arrangement work."

The arrangement did not work. It might have been made to work, if uneasily, had two different men been concerned. It would not work under the stresses imposed upon it by the conflict between two characters as dissident as were Blamey's and Rowell's.

So Rowell left New Guinea for Australia. It was the end of his hope of making a military name in the Pacific war; but it was not the end of the Blamey-Rowell affair.

4

The Government, whose action in sending Blamey to New Guinea had precipitated the crisis, now faced the reckoning.

Rowell went back to his home in Melbourne, took a few weeks' leave, wrote a report on the New Guinea operations, and became a general without a command. Blamey stayed in New Guinea, where General Herring had been sent to replace Rowell as commander of New Guinea Force. The battle of the Owen Stanleys was being fought, and the Australians were getting the upper hand, however slowly. But the other battle, the battle between Blamey and Rowell, was not over. Rowell had some powerful supporters; he also had a good measure of political and public sympathy. He could not be allowed to spend the rest of the war digging his garden. In fact, he had no intention of spending the rest of the war doing anything so passive.

Blamey, in a letter to Curtin on October 1, had elaborated his reasons for having dismissed Rowell. In the course of this letter he said:

"I would like to say that the personal animus displayed towards me was most unexpected. . . I informed him perfectly frankly of the exact incidence of events which led me to come to New Guinea, and there appears to be no ground for any resentment or objection on his part. It seemed to me when I received your directions and those of the C.-in-C., S.W.P.A., that it behoved me to carry out those instructions, and there can be no doubt that when the consequent instructions were given to General Rowell, it was his duty also to carry them out without question, cheerfully and co-operatively.

"I endeavoured to induce him to see this point of view, but his resentment was too deep. . . ."

It must have been obvious to the Government that the longer the question of Rowell's future went unsolved, the harder it would be to find a satisfactory solution—especially since, as the weeks went by, Blamey's rancour seemed to grow. One thing was clear: the South-West Pacific was not large enough to hold both Blamey and Rowell.

The Government thought it had found a way through the morass early in November. It devised a plan for the sending of a military mission to Soviet Russia, with Rowell as leader. Blamey would have none of it. He radioed Curtin and Forde objecting strongly to the proposal on disciplinary grounds. He sent a similar message to Shedden, Secretary of the Defence Department. For the Government to have persisted in sending Rowell to the Soviet Union with the rank of lieutenant-general would have been a vote of no-confidence in Blamey. So the proposal was dropped.

It was nearly the end of January, 1943, before Rowell's fate was

settled. The manner in which it was settled was attributable largely to the efforts of two men. They were Brigadier (later Major-General) C. E. M. Lloyd, at that time Director of Staff Duties, and Harry Alderman, K.C., an intimate of both Blamey and certain of the War Cabinet hierarchy, including Curtin.

Lloyd, a Staff Corps officer, was one of the most brilliant men ever to have passed through Duntroon. He was a "Blamey man" to his fingertips; but he also had a deep liking for Rowell the man, and a deep respect for Rowell the soldier. He had once or twice tried to discuss the subject of Rowell's future with Blamey, only to be brusquely silenced. Now he saw a chance to make Alderman the intercessor.

Alderman held a commission from the Government empowering him to move about Australia's war areas examining and settling claims against all the fighting services. As a civilian, he was not subject to the inhibitions imposed upon a soldier, in his dealings either with Cabinet or with senior officers of the Services. Moreover, his friendship with Blamey had stood the test of many years. So Lloyd talked to Alderman. Lloyd himself felt he dared not make another approach to Blamey on Rowell's behalf. He would, as he put it, "lose my military head in the tiger's jaws if I were to mention it again." But Alderman had no military head to lose.

"The first time you mention Rowell you will be snubbed," Lloyd told him. "The second time the Old Man will be angry. But if you keep at him he might listen to you. And if the worst comes to the worst, it doesn't matter to you!"

Alderman agreed to risk Blamey's displeasure. For he was an admirer of Rowell, and he wished to see the unhappy affair settled with a minimum of anguish to anyone involved in it. He left the mainland for New Guinea on December 10. When he arrived back in Melbourne, about five weeks later, he carried with him Blamey's promise that a brigadier's post should be found for Rowell. It would be a sharp downward step from the eminence of lieutenant-general's rank; but at least Rowell's career would be saved.

Blamey, back from New Guinea, reached Melbourne a few days before Alderman. As soon as he was settled he called Lloyd to his office.

"Here's something for you to fix up," he said.

He handed Lloyd a scrap of paper. It bore a few words pencilled in Blamey's handwriting. When Lloyd deciphered these, he found they constituted an instruction that Rowell was to be reduced to his substantive rank of colonel, and that his future employment was then to be examined. It was evidently Blamey's intention, in terms of

his promise to Alderman, to have Rowell assigned to some post carrying brigadier's status.

"Well," said Lloyd, "what are we going to do about this? Give it to the Adjutant-General?"

"No," said Blamey. "I'm going to change you to the A.G.'s chair, and that's to be your first job."

The Adjutant-General then was Major-General V. P. H. Stantke. Blamey's words were Lloyd's first intimation that he was to be elevated to one of the Army's key-posts. That much was welcome news. The instruction that he was to have the task of putting shears to Rowell's military wings was not. Lloyd decided not to rush his fences. He stowed the scrap of paper in his pocket and tried to forget about it for a few days.

It was a sage action, because Alderman was not idle. After a few days in Melbourne he flew to Adelaide, his home town. From Adelaide he telephoned John Curtin in Canberra. He told Curtin that Blamey was willing to see Rowell return to active duty as a brigadier. He also told Curtin that he believed Blamey would agree to let Rowell have a major-general's appointment if Curtin were to urge it as a personal favour.

Alderman was back in Melbourne next day. In fact, he was in Victoria Barracks when Blamey was summoned to his telephone to take a Canberra call from Curtin. Blamey spoke behind closed doors, but when he reappeared it was to tell Alderman that Rowell would be given an appointment carrying major-general's rank.

"He will go to the Middle East in charge of A.I.F. details," Blamey said.

When Alderman told Lloyd of the conversation, Lloyd scratched his ear and grunted, "But there are no A.I.F. details in the Middle East! What's in the Old Man's mind?"

Alderman went back to Blamey and asked him to elucidate the point.

"Well," Blamey explained, "the 9th Division is coming home, but there'll be A.I.F. details left behind, signallers and so forth. And then there will be invalided prisoners of war from Italy. Rowell will go to Cairo to administer them."

Alderman asked if the post would carry any special overseas allowance.

"I shan't put pen to paper to give or take away any privilege or right," Blamey said. "Whatever follows from the appointment. No more, and no less!"

Thus Rowell was brought back to the bosom of the Army.

Rowell, in a hand-written note, dated January 21, before the

Middle East appointment was decided, had asked Blamey for a personal interview. Blamey had refused the request. On the eve of his departure for the Middle East, Rowell sent Blamey another hand-written letter:

Dear Sir Thomas,

I regret that my early departure for the Middle East and your absence from Melbourne give no possibility of reconsideration of your decision not to grant me an interview. At the same time, I feel that I cannot leave this country without expressing on paper some of the matters I had hoped to discuss with you. This course, although the only one open to me, is yet unsatisfactory, as the written word can hardly be so precise and free from wrong interpretation as a personal discussion.

I suggest that you will admit that I have given you loyal, devoted, and disinterested service since our association commenced in October, 1939. Only on one occasion, namely, before we went to Greece, did I put forward any suggestion that my own interests might be advanced. If you accept this as a basis, it follows that I must have been more than ordinarily moved by the turn of events to have adopted the attitude I did. It is equally true that, when one is sincerely and deeply moved, it is some little time before one returns to normal. In the case in point, I had accepted the situation and was determined to do my best to make it work. Had you suspended judgment for perhaps 24 hours, I feel sure I would have gone a long way towards withdrawing statements, not really relevant to the matter at issue, which were made in the heat of the moment.

I am not whining over the outcome of the difference of view, as I have served long enough to know the rules of the game and the powers of commanders. But I do believe there is still room, and need, for the expression of a deep-rooted conviction on matters which profoundly affect the service, and have no personal application. I know you considered that I was merely batting for myself and not for the team, but this was not so, and I hoped that our close association would have enabled the matter to be talked out and resolved.

I trust you have continued good health, and that the future operations in this area go successfully. The problems ahead are pretty grim, and it is my regret that I am not to be permitted to have a hand in solving them.

With kind regards,
Yours sincerely . . .

Even many of Blamey's admirers considered it a pity that he did not respond to this last effort by Rowell to repair their shattered

relationship. But that was Blamey, an unshakeable friend, an implacable enemy.

Some months later Auchinleck, then Commander-in-Chief, India, asked the Australian Government if he might borrow Rowell's services to command a division. Blamey opposed the granting of the request, both officially, in a letter to Shedden, and unofficially, in a radio message to Auchinleck, who then dropped the matter.

Late in 1943 the British War Office asked Australia for the loan of Rowell's services as Director of Tactical Investigation—a post whose incumbent is concerned with tactical handling of weapons, knowledge of new weapons in production, and advice on general tactical doctrines based on a study of current operations. In an exchange of radio messages with Field-Marshal Sir Alan Brooke (later Viscount Alanbrooke), then Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Blamey demurred, citing the circumstances in which Rowell had been relieved in New Guinea. But when Brooke described the nature of the proposed appointment, Blamey withdrew his objections, and volunteered an opinion that Rowell was "well suited" for it.

So, on the last day of 1943, Rowell became Director of Tactical Investigation at the War Office. In this post he was to play a valuable part in the preparation of plans for the invasion of Western Europe in 1944, notably in shaping methods of collaboration between air fleets engaged in close-support bombardment tasks and land forces.

The struggle between Blamey and Rowell had spent itself. They were to meet again, never as friends, but never as open enemies. And Fate was to write an ironic footnote to their mis-alliance. Rowell was Australia's Chief of the General Staff when Blamey died on May 27, 1951. Thus he was the Army's chief official mourner at Blamey's funeral.

13

PAPUA FRONT

1

NEW GUINEA laid a curious spell on Blamey. Its flowers and wild creatures, its rain-forests and waterways enchanted him. He revelled in the hot, still nights. Even after a day in which he had spent hours plunging through the jungle, sometimes knee-deep in mud, he gave little sign of weariness.

He would sit before his hut until one or two in the morning, yarning with one or another of his personal staff, and refusing to turn in. "It's sacrilege to spend these beautiful nights in sleeping," he would say.

The jungle's green indifference to men and their puny affairs conquered him, as it had conquered many another man. He read every word of authoritative information he could lay hands on about New Guinea's past, present, and future.

When the enemy had been pushed back into the lowlands north of the Owen Stanleys, and the personal pressure on Blamey had eased a trifle, he heard that an expert on New Guinea was hiding his light under a captain's uniform in Port Moresby. The expert was a one-armed Australian zoologist and explorer, Dr. A. J. Marshall. Blamey had lately chanced to read a book by Marshall on the Wewak-Hollandia area, so he summoned him. Marshall found himself searchingly questioned about the country, its hazards, its Melanesian people, and the likelihood of their collaborating with the enemy, about potential landing-grounds, and the possibility of a stranded enemy living off the land. Blamey was obviously foreseeing that the Japanese would concentrate large forces far to the westward of Salamaua and Lae, places whose loss by the enemy still seemed a remote possibility then.

After that first meeting Marshall came to know Blamey well, and at odd intervals found himself summoned up the hill on curious errands. Once it was to talk about the birth of marsupials. Many Australians, educated and otherwise, believe that kangaroos, possums, and the like are born in the pouch, even though the essentials of marsupial birth were discovered as long ago as 1806. Blamey confided to Marshall that he was expecting a call from a friend, and he

wanted exact anatomical information to enable him to confound "this born-in-the-pouch theorist." It was with a mixture of astonishment and amusement that Marshall found that Blamey quickly assimilated, with the help of diagrams, distinctions between placental and marsupial birth that trouble the perception of many honours students in zoology.

At a time when the clearance of the Japanese from New Guinea seemed a long way off, Blamey asked Marshall to find a site close to Port Moresby which could, without undue labour, be developed into a small national park. After the war, Blamey told Marshall, the bodies of Australians killed in action would not be taken home, but would be reburied at various settlements near where they had fallen. There would be a stream of wives and mothers to graves in the dry, and relatively unpicturesque, Moresby area. Could Marshall therefore find a park area within easy reach of Port Moresby?

With the aid of a small open-cockpit reconnaissance plane, Marshall found a charming little lake, complete with water-lilies, lotus-birds, dab-chicks, a sago-swamp, a lonely crocodile, and even a reputed ghost. The lake nestled in a patch of rain-forest on the steep hillside of the Loloki River, below the Roana Falls. There was already a rough track in, and Marshall told Blamey that a jeep might just about get to the outskirts. They started off together.

When Marshall told Blamey that he would get his khaki shorts and immaculately polished shoes muddied and scratched, he replied that he was not going near any damned sago-swamp: he would view the lake from afar. But when he saw the glint of clear blue water through the palm trees he quickly climbed out of the jeep and clambered enthusiastically into the dim-lit rain-forest. He sank to his waist in a mass of rotting logs and sago spikes. Marshall and the driver hauled him out, and he philosophically plucked the more accessible thorns from his flesh and scooped rich jungle ooze from his flanks.

But he liked the site Marshall had chosen. He recruited a landscape gardener, with a small staff, and told him to transform the wilderness into a primitive park. The work went on while the war flowed north-west from Moresby, which now became a sort of military ghost-town. Later Blamey and Marshall revisited the place together. Blamey was delighted with the progress that had been made. But his dream of a wild park was hardly to survive the end of the war. In April, 1946, the park was taken over by the Papua Administration, which abandoned it to the jungle about two years later.

Blamey's interest in such extra-military matters did not cause him to lose his grip for an instant on the progress of the operations in the Owen Stanleys and north of Milne Bay. At half-past seven each morning he was at his work-table, studying situation reports and shaping

new plans for the enemy's discomfiture. He knew the Battle of Papua had still to be won, but he never seemed to doubt his ability to win it. Like every successful military commander, Blamey was a man of magnificent ego. He was always convinced of the rightness of what he did because he did it—even though, in retrospect, he was able to recognise his errors of judgment for what they were.

2

If many of the Australians who faced the Japanese in Papua started by believing they were arrayed against a species of superman their belief was understandable.

Until the battles of Papua and Guadalcanal were fought the Japanese had carried all before them. For the elementary reason that they knew the tricks of jungle fighting, which their opponents had still to learn, they seemed to be endowed with powers of military wizardry. Blamey realised that this myth had to be dispelled. He went among units which he believed had failed against the enemy for no good reason, and spoke in forthright language to officers and men. It was the officers who felt the rougher side of his tongue.

"Do you think you're fit to command such troops?" he demanded of one set of battalion officers.

He told one unit that it was not the man with the gun but the rabbit who runs that gets shot. The words left a deep scar. Months, even years, later, men of this unit were to signalise Blamey's appearances by softly whistling "Run, rabbit, run!" or ostentatiously stuffing handfuls of grass into their mouths. They did not know that Blamey had found it agonising to speak to frontline soldiers in such terms, and that after the "rabbit" address he broke down and sat in the car carrying him back to his headquarters with tears streaming down his cheeks.

His nature had two distinct sides. One side was as hard as tungsten; when it was in the ascendant he could break any officer or man without flicking an eyelid. The other side was almost womanishly soft; when he let it assert itself, all his ruthlessness went. On the hard side, he was an implacable stickler for his own rights, even if the issue itself were apparently trivial. Some years before the second war he was invited, as Chief Commissioner of Police, to the annual smoke concert of ex-servicemen members of the Commercial Travellers' Association of Victoria. The Army was represented at the function by a regular officer, Major-General (later Lieutenant-General) Sir Carl Jess, then Adjutant-General. There had never been much affection between Blamey and Jess; both had begun their working lives as

school-teachers, and both had been commissioned in the Regular Army in its early years, Blamey in 1906, Jess in 1909. When Blamey discovered that Jess was listed to respond to the Toast of the Armed Services, he sent a message asking for a word with E. J. Binney, secretary of the C.T.A.

"I am the senior military officer present," Blamey told Binney. "It is my privilege to reply to this Toast."

"But you were invited as Chief Commissioner of Police, sir," protested Binney, startled by the possibility of an upheaval.

"I am still the senior military officer present," Blamey insisted. This was indisputable. Blamey, though no longer a member of the Regular Army, was on the Active List, as a militia officer, and at the time commanded the 3rd Division. "I claim the right to reply. Otherwise, I shall leave."

The tactful Binney hurriedly rearranged the programme to permit Blamey to exercise his right. It was an education to him in the inflexible nature of military protocol—not to mention the inflexible nature of Blamey.

Yet Blamey was not always implacable. It is popularly believed that he would destroy without mercy anyone who spoke a syllable in derogation of him or his actions. The evidence annuls this charge. When Blamey relieved Rowell of the command of New Guinea Force, Colonel Charles Spry was G.S.O. I of the 7th Division on the Kokoda Trail. Spry, though a Blamey admirer, considered Rowell's dismissal to be unjust, and he wrote a letter to his wife, expressing his view in emphatic terms. In her reply his wife remarked that for the first time one of Spry's letters had been censored; it had arrived with two pages missing. Spry had no doubt which pages had been removed, or that they had found their way to Blamey. Well, he decided, it was only a matter now of waiting for the hangman to come and put an end to a promising military career. But nothing happened. Blamey's manner was unchanged; Spry was still "Charles," as he always had been. Spry was uncertain until after the war whether or not Blamey had seen the missing pages of the letter. One day a friend of his, playing golf with Blamey, chanced to mention his name.

"Oh, Spry!" Blamey addressed the ball, with a faint smile on his lips. "My word, there's a young man who speaks his mind!"

An Australian battalion commander also profited by Blamey's unpublicised quality of mercy. Norman Carlyon heard that this officer, while on leave in Melbourne, had made a semi-public statement that "Blamey was booed off the platform" when addressing a frontline unit on the jungle front. Carlyon was troubled. This was no tale told by a mainland base-area gossip, but by the commander

of a fighting unit. Carlyon also knew the story to be false, because he had been with Blamey on his visit to the unit concerned. He urged Blamey to put the battalion commander on the mat.

"Norman," Blamey said, "if I tried to catch up with half the people who tell stories against me, I'd have no time to command the Army."

Carlyon pressed the point again next day, and Blamey brusquely dismissed him. It was not until Carlyon, in some trepidation, urged it for a third time that Blamey said, "All right. Get him in here."

The battalion commander was with Blamey for about three-quarters of an hour. When he came out he looked profoundly thoughtful. Carlyon went into Blamey's room. Blamey was sitting behind his desk, staring into space.

"Can I do anything, sir?" Carlyon asked.

"No," Blamey said curtly.

Carlyon realised he was being sent about his business, but, with some daring, he asked:

"What did you say to him, sir?"

"I just talked to him as I'd have talked to young Tom," Blamey said. "I don't think he'll say any more things of that kind."

There is no evidence that the battalion commander, who finished the war with a fine fighting record, ever did breathe another damaging word about Blamey.

But one detractor more or less was neither here nor there: Blamey had so many of them. It was inevitable that a man of his full-blooded and personally indiscreet character should give his enemies plenty of ammunition. It was also inevitable that a man in his post should have to carry the public blame for acts of Government policy, and for acts by MacArthur, which he neither initiated nor necessarily approved. Many of Blamey's critics tend to forget that all through the Pacific operations he had in MacArthur not a small, but a large, flea on his back to bite him. He never sought to shirk responsibility for his own acts; but MacArthur was, no less than Blamey, the author of some pieces of ruthlessness which appeared, in the context of the time though not always later, to be necessary for the efficient conduct of the war. Such an episode occurred as the Australians fought their way northward in Papua. The chief figure in it was Major-General A. S. Allen, commanding the forces on the Kokoda Trail.

3

There can have been no better-loved senior officer in the Second A.I.F. than the plump and blue-eyed Allen, popularly known as "Tubby." He had served throughout the first war as an infantry officer, and had risen to command of a battalion. In the second war he had

taken the 16th Brigade to the Middle East and commanded it in the fighting in the Western Desert and Greece. A few days after the opening of the Syria campaign he had been promoted G.O.C. of the 7th Division, and had led the division ever since. Allen was a seasoned and wily infantry commander. He and the men he led had had no jungle experience until they found themselves acting as the Australian spearhead in the fight to drive the Japanese out of Papua, but Allen had no qualms about their ability to accomplish the task.

In his forward headquarters the rumble of the explosion accompanying Rowell's dismissal reached him only faintly. He heard that MacArthur was in Port Moresby for a few days at the beginning of October, and he knew that Blamey and Herring were devising new supply channels to speed his advance. But Allen was little concerned with any of these matters. His problem lay with the enemy in front of him, the immediate problem of killing the enemy and staying alive yourself.

He had reason to be satisfied with the achievements of his men in those first days of October. As Blamey wrote to Curtin on October 4:

"With reference to the operations which are now progressing for the seizure of the route over the Owen Stanley Range towards Kokoda, this has progressed more rapidly than we had any reason to expect. . . .

"The difficulty is now one of supply. This must be almost entirely dependent upon our capacity to drop supplies from the air at predetermined dropping places. The number of troops that can be maintained in the forward area is entirely dependent upon this, and our capacity to fight the Japanese is dependent upon the number of troops that we can maintain. If the enemy is very determined, he should be able to produce superior forces to ours somewhere between our present position and Kokoda. All indications are at the moment that he is on the run, and it is possible that he has not planned sufficiently far ahead to do this, as our advance has been very rapid and largely unexpected by him."

Three days later, Blamey wrote to MacArthur that Allen was "pushing forward steadily, and if prisoners and natives captured are to be believed, we may not have a great deal of trouble to get to Kokoda."

So events in Papua appeared to be shaping for success. But as day followed day in the second week of October, and little progress was made, both MacArthur, in Brisbane, and Blamey, in Port Moresby, grew restive. MacArthur radioed Blamey on October 11, demanding to know what was delaying the advance. Blamey signalled Allen the same day:

". . . Your orders definitely to push on with sufficient force and capture Kokoda. You have been furnished with supplies as you required, and ample appear to be available. In view lack of serious opposition, advance appears much too slow. You will press enemy with vigour. If you are feeling strain personally, relief will be arranged. Please be frank about this. . . ."

Allen replied: "The most serious opposition to advance is terrain. The second is maintenance of supplies through lack of native carriers. . . . This country is much tougher than any previous theatre, and cannot be appreciated until seen. . . . Am not feeling the strain. I never felt fitter, nor able to think straighter. I, however, feel somewhat disappointed on behalf of all ranks that you are dissatisfied with the very fine effort they have made. . . ."

MacArthur radioed again on October 17: "Press General Allen's advance. His extremely light casualties indicate no serious effort yet made to displace enemy. It is essential that the Kokoda airfield be taken."

Blamey relayed this message to Allen, with his own footnote: "You will attack enemy with energy and all possible speed at each point of resistance. Essential that Kokoda airfield be taken at earliest. Apparent enemy gaining time by delaying you with inferior strength."

Blamey wrote to MacArthur on October 18: "General Allen's progress has been slow. . . . His difficulties, of course, are very great. In addition to the terrain and the constant rain, supply-dropping grounds are very few, and recoveries are not as great as one would hope. . . ."

MacArthur's impatience was not soothed by Blamey's implicit plea for understanding of Allen's difficulties. He radioed Blamey on October 20: "Operational reports show that progress on the Trail is not satisfactory. The tactical handling of our troops, in my opinion, is faulty. With forces superior to the enemy we are bringing to bear in actual combat only a small fraction of available strength, enabling the enemy at the point of actual contact to oppose us with apparently comparable forces. Every extra day of delay complicates the problem and will probably result ultimately in greater casualties than a decisive stroke made in full force. Our supply situation and the condition of the troops certainly compare favourably with those of the enemy, and weather conditions are neutral. It is essential to the entire New Guinea operation that the Kokoda airfield be secured promptly. . . ."

Blamey relayed the message to Allen without comment. He followed it next day with a message of his own counselling Allen to

act "with greater boldness." Allen replied that he was "singularly hurt" by MacArthur's message. He added:

"I fully appreciate the major plan and therefore that time is most essential. All my force are doing their level best to push on. . . ."

On October 26, Blamey signalled Allen expressing puzzlement that "in view of your superior strength, enemy appears able to delay advance at will. Essential that forward commanders should control situation and not allow situation to control them. Delay in seizing Kokoda may cost us unique opportunity of driving enemy out of New Guinea." Allen replied that the delay was causing him "considerable concern, in view of its probable effect upon your general plan."

Next day Blamey signalled Allen: "Consider that you have had sufficiently prolonged tour of duty in forward area. General Vasey will arrive Myola by air, morning, 28 Oct. On arrival you will hand over command to him and return to Port Moresby for tour of duty in this area . . ."

Blamey informed MacArthur of what he had done. MacArthur replied: "Concur fully in your action in placing Vasey in command at front. Feel sure he will take his column through without undue delay. Please give him my felicitations and tell him of my confidence."

It was a bitter pill for Allen, who believed that his dogged pressure on the enemy was even then on the point of turning the scale—an estimate not without merit, since Kokoda village was re-entered by the Australians on November 2. Their advance from Ioribaiwa to Kokoda had taken thirty-five days, sixteen fewer than the Japanese had needed to advance over the same ground in their thrust toward Port Moresby. Most of the road back had been re-taken under Allen's leadership.

It was to be Allen's last fighting command in the war, and his eclipse was to be cited as another example of Blamey's "ruthlessness." It is an unhappy fact that the very nature of war makes ruthlessness inseparable from war's successful prosecution. Blamey cherished no illusions on this score. He once observed to A. H. Lowe, Secretary of the Naval and Military Club, Melbourne, "You know, Sandy, a commander-in-chief must be prepared to have breakfast with his brother and shoot him before lunch!" But whispers that Blamey removed Allen because he feared him, as a potential rival for the Commander-in-Chief's post, were ludicrous. Allen was a victim, not of Blamey's envy or fear, but of the mischances of war.

4

The campaign which wrested Papua from Japan's hands and ended with the fall of Sanananda in January, 1943, was wearying to the

TOP: *Blamey and MacArthur*

BELOW: *Armistice, Tokyo Bay*

The baton

nerves and bodies of the soldiers who fought it. A conscientious recital of the story would be hardly less wearying to the reader. It is sufficient for this narrative that Blamey, whether operating from his Port Moresby headquarters, or flying over the Owen Stanleys to confer with General Herring as the advance moved down the northern slopes toward Buna, Gona, and Sanananda, was the controlling spirit. No detail escaped him. Hardly a day passed on which Herring did not send Blamey a minute report on the progress of the fighting. These letters, written in Herring's meticulous script, often ran to five or six foolscap pages. Blamey analysed the facts they contained, and sent back equally minute replies full of tactical wisdom.

Thus, on November 30, Blamey wrote to Herring: "I think it is a great error in tactics to hammer away at pockets, since it delays the operation, and leads to a great many casualties. If the pocket is sufficiently covered, I think you should push on to your objective. We can either deal with pockets by starving them out, or blowing them out later."

And on December 4: "I am very worried over the mixture of tactical units which is continuing in the force. I think this is always a mistake. . . . Once tactical unity is broken, it is very hard to re-establish. . . . I do not think you can break any principle of war without having to pay for it in some way or other, and the disintegration of units goes contrary to a very sound principle of war organisation."

And on December 11: "I note that your policy is now rather one of sit down and wait, and quite honestly I am afraid of it. We have a devilish determined enemy to deal with, and delay is dangerous."

In these months, Blamey contrived to do the seemingly impossible. He exercised general command in the field, and at the same time handled an inevitable flow of matters concerning the business of his wide-spread forces which nobody else was empowered to handle. He seemed capable of taking in his stride obstacles which would have caused most men to quail.

For instance, he was in the midst of the Papua operations when the agitation for the return of the 9th Division from the Middle East rose to its height. The Australian Government had in April, 1942, asked the British Government to release the 9th Division. However, Australia had agreed, when Rommel's 1942 desert offensive carried him forward to El Alamein and threatened to overrun the Nile Delta, that the matter should not be pressed. It was an understandable gesture at a moment when British defences in the Middle East appeared to be tottering. It was also an altruistic act on Australia's part when the Japanese were advancing on Port Moresby, and men, especially trained men, were Australia's first need.

The 9th Division was hurried to Egypt to lend its aid in the task of stopping Rommel at El Alamein. And when Morshead reported at Auchinleck's battle headquarters in the desert to discuss the division's role, he learned that the memory of Blamey still lingered on in the Middle East. Auchinleck wished to break the division into brigades, using each brigade for a special task. Morshead told him he might use the division as a whole, but not in fragments.

"So you're being like Tom Blamey, eh!" said Auchinleck. "You're being sticky! The mantle of Tom Blamey has fallen on you!"

However, it was unnecessary for Morshead to remind Auchinleck that he had inherited not only Blamey's mantle, but also the power to control the employment of the A.I.F. conferred on Blamey by his charter from the Australian Government.

The 9th Division stayed in the line to act as the infantry spearhead of the attack which early in November crumbled Rommel's defences, and started the Axis forces on their retreat to Cape Bon. When Montgomery was asked on his postwar visit to Australia what the result would have been if the Curtin Government had refused to allow the 9th Division to be used at El Alamein, he replied, "We should have lost the battle."

Naturally, Blamey was deeply involved in the discussions surrounding the division's retention in the Middle East. And once again he found himself impelled to put a spoke in the wheel of the "Union of British Generals." He wrote to Curtin on August 21:

"The Press messages during the last two or three days have announced the appointment of General Alexander to command the Middle East, Major-General Montgomery to command the 8th Army, and Major-General Lumsden [later Lieutenant-General Herbert Lumsden] to command a corps in that army. I am unaware of the extent to which the Australian Government was consulted, but in view of the fact that a considerable body of Australian troops are involved, the matter is not one of indifference to us.

"Without in any way derogating from the officers concerned who have been appointed, I would like to bring to your notice that not any of them have had the same experience of desert warfare or the same success in any warfare as General Morshead. . . . He cannot but feel humiliated at this action in placing inexperienced English officers in command over him.

"The disregard which British authorities have invariably shown to Australian officers in this aspect in the Middle East is notorious and a very great deal of feeling has been aroused in the Australian Army by this latest demonstration of that attitude.

"I would like to suggest that if you see fit, you might consider making representations through the High Commissioner that where Australian forces are associated with U.K. forces, the claims of successful Australian commanders for consideration for higher command should not be disregarded. They should not be required to serve perpetually under untried junior English officers."

Curtin sent a personal cablegram to Churchill, who replied that Morshead had been carefully considered for one of the higher commands, and that his "undoubted qualifications for a higher appointment" would be taken into account in any further change. Blamey knew the practical worth of this soft answer. His scepticism was confirmed by a cablegram from Morshead on September 15. Morshead described a conversation he had had with Montgomery. Montgomery had said that both he and Alexander were of opinion that, since Morshead was not a regular soldier, he did not possess "the requisite training and experience" for a more senior command.

Morshead's message continued: "Montgomery, who has revitalised 8th Army, is quite friendly, but just doubts capacity any general who has not devoted entire life to soldiering."

Blamey sent a copy of Morshead's message to Curtin, with this comment: "This brings out clearly the repugnance of the British Command to accept Dominion officers, however successful, in higher commands by reason of the fact that they have not been turned out on the British pattern.

"This attitude of unconscious arrogance has created more ill-feeling against British commanders amongst senior Australian officers than should be allowed to develop. General Morshead is still a divisional commander, but it is safe to say that there is no Corps commander operating in the Middle East who has had the same amount of experience and the same amount of successful operational command, both as an independent commander and under a superior, than he."

Though the British were reluctant to entrust Morshead with the powers of higher command, they were eager to hold him and what Churchill described in a message to Curtin as "the well-seasoned" 9th Division in the Middle East. But Curtin, MacArthur, and Blamey could not agree that the division should remain overseas. Australia simply did not have enough men to meet its commitments in the Pacific and also continue to reinforce the 9th Division abroad. It was impracticable for Alexander and Montgomery to release the division until after the Battle of El Alamein was fought. But within three weeks of Rommel's defeat the division was transferred to the

Middle East reserve. It was then only a matter of waiting for ships to carry it home.

Blamey had need of the 9th Division as 1942 drew to a close. He pointed out to Curtin, in a letter dated December 4, that, after the Buna operations were completed, the 6th and 7th Divisions would both require a prolonged rest out of action.

"This means," he wrote, "that the defence of Papua will rest for a time mainly on militia and American forces. My faith in the militia is growing, but my faith in the Americans has sunk to zero."

There had been little in the showing of the 32nd U.S. Division in the Papua campaign to inspire confidence.

". . . it is a very sorry story," Blamey remarked in his letter to Curtin. "It has revealed the fact that the American troops cannot be classified as attack troops. They are definitely not equal to the Australian militia, and from the moment they met opposition sat down and have hardly gone forward a yard.

". . . I feel quite sure in my own mind that the American forces, which have been expanded even more rapidly than our own were in the first years of the war, will not attain any high standard of training or war spirit for very many months to come."

Blamey, as an Australian, must have derived some private satisfaction from the writing of these comments, after the American officers surrounding MacArthur had had so little to say in praise of the Australian soldier's fighting qualities. As Allied Land Forces Commander, he doubtless found more satisfaction in the appearance on the Buna front of Lieutenant-General Robert Eichelberger, who was later to command the U.S. 8th Army. Eichelberger's task was, in simple terms, to inspire a little fighting spirit in American officers and men. His success proved again that there are no bad troops, only bad officers.

Eichelberger has told in his book *Jungle Road to Tokyo* the story of how he was summoned from Rockhampton to MacArthur's Port Moresby headquarters. MacArthur told him:

"I am sending you in, Bob, and I want you to remove all officers who won't fight. Relieve regimental and brigade commanders; if necessary, put sergeants in charge of battalions and corporals in charge of companies—anyone who will fight. . . ."

And the Americans, no less than the Australians, felt the impact of Blamey's personality. One of their battalion commanders shook his head after an inspection by Blamey, and said: "He's the commander, all right. I'd know him for the top man without any badges of rank. I'd know the sonofabitch in his pyjamas. He descended on us like a cartload of tigers!"

5

Blamey had two battles to fight in New Guinea. One was the shooting battle against the Japanese. The other was the battle against the malarial mosquito.

Australia went into the Pacific war without much thought of the menace of malaria. Of course, everyone knew that New Guinea was infested with an ugly little creature called the anopheles mosquito. You were liable to catch malaria if one of these creatures bit you, but if you took your quinine and trusted to luck you would probably coast along well enough. As the Papua campaign progressed, it became clear that if the anopheles mosquito were not beaten we should coast along, not well enough, but to defeat. Malaria was inflicting heavy casualties on the forces in the Owen Stanleys, even heavier casualties on the forces at Milne Bay. By December, 1942, eighty-two in every thousand officers and men at Milne Bay were going down with malaria every week. This was a rate of about 425 per cent a year—which made the rate of battle casualties an insignificant item.

Burston, Blamey's medical chief, and Brigadier W. W. S. Johnston, Deputy-Director of Medical Services, New Guinea Force, instructed Lieutenant-Colonel Edward Ford to investigate the incidence of malaria and recommend measures for controlling it. Ford, a Victorian-born doctor of medicine, with an inquiring mind and an insistently persuasive voice, was an expert in tropical medicine. Before the war he had been a lecturer in the Sydney University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, of which he was to become director two years after the war's end. He went to work at Milne Bay, and dug into the problem. Then he called on Blamey.

Blamey glanced up from the table in his office-tent at Port Moresby, to see a tall, loose-limbed figure looming before him. The figure wore lieutenant-colonel's badges of rank, but to Blamey's eyes he was startlingly unlike the conception of a soldier. He announced himself as Ford, drew up a chair, and without invitation, sat down and began to talk. A December rainstorm was drumming on the canvas roof of the tent, but it was no kind of competition for Ford's voice. Blamey frowned, and shuffled the papers on his table, in a way that had never failed to disconcert importunate callers. It did not disconcert Ford. He went on talking about malaria, and what it had done, and would do, to the forces in New Guinea unless it were checked.

Blamey stopped frowning and shuffling his papers. Here he realised, was a man who knew exactly what he was talking about, a man with a message of the highest importance. Ford talked for about fifteen minutes, and Blamey hardly interrupted him. Then the cross-

examination began. Blamey challenged every statement he had made, and compelled him to prove it.

Then he said: "Well, what have we got to do?"

Ford listed the essentials. First, a thousand native labourers were required to do anti-malaria work at Milne Bay, such as dig drains. Second, a high priority must be prescribed for atebrin and other anti-malaria stores, which had been coming to New Guinea in only a thin trickle. Third, commanders must be made responsible for anti-malaria discipline in their units. In short, control was not only a matter of discovering new and revolutionary methods of treatment, but also of applying the recognised measures, of burning into officers and men a realisation of the indispensability of playing the anti-malaria game according to the rules.

Blamey acted at once. Five hundred labourers were drafted to Milne Bay within about a week, another five hundred soon afterwards. A priority was fixed for anti-malaria stores, which gave these equality with ammunition and food. Orders for rigid tightening of anti-malaria discipline were issued, and action to instruct officers and men in self-protective measures was taken throughout the Australian Forces.

A few days later a short article appeared in *Guinea Gold*, the Australian Army newspaper in New Guinea. In down-to-earth language it described the threat hidden in the proboscis of the anopheles mosquito. Then it went on:

Some Fifth Columnist has circulated a story that taking quinine makes a man impotent. Nothing could be more false.

But it is quite certain that repeated attacks of malaria will do so. A man becomes so weakened by repeated attacks that he loses all his energy and doesn't find much interest in life anyway.

Only one person can safeguard you against this, and that is yourself.

The article then enumerated the routine precautions open to the soldier—daily doses of quinine, sleeping under a net, shirt sleeves down and slacks and gaiters on after sundown.

When Ford saw the article he recognised it as a perfect exposition for the layman of anti-malaria precautions. It expressed, in a form the densest man could understand, every essential point, without a single technicality to confuse the issue. Ford supposed a doctor, with an expert knowledge of malaria and a knack of popular journalism, had written it. He discovered the author was Blamey. It was a classic example of Blamey's ability to comprehend a subject essentially different from his own.

Within a few months the incidence of malaria in the Milne Bay area had sunk, under the influence of the measures Blamey authorised,

from eighty-two to five in every thousand. Thus, the foundations of the conquest of malaria in the Pacific war were laid in Blamey's tent, in the midst of a December rainstorm. It was a conquest in which Australia, through the work of such men as Brigadier (later Sir) Neil Fairley, was to play the leading part. The discoveries Fairley and his team made in the L.H.Q. Research Unit were to be generally adopted and applied by the American and British, as well as the Australian, fighting forces. When difficulties arose, either in getting costly scientific equipment or in recruiting human guinea pigs, Fairley and his men knew they had only to appeal to Blamey. Time after time, he swept obstacles out of their path.

In fact, Blamey became something of a malariologist in his own right. Ford discovered in their later talks that Blamey appeared to have a deep, an almost professional, knowledge of malaria. He would challenge the experts with questions that were intelligent, pertinent, and often provokingly hard to answer. Ford was baffled to find a mere soldier so intimately acquainted with the esoterics of an abstruse medical subject until he did a little snooping. This disclosed that Blamey had armed himself with a copy of Manson-Bahr's *Tropical Diseases*, a standard British work, and was studying it with all the avidity of a medical freshman.

Blamey never had confined his professional reading to military textbooks. He believed there was no kind of human knowledge that was useless to a soldier.

6

Blamey was back in Melbourne when Sanananda fell and the end came in Papua. He left Port Moresby on January 13, four days behind MacArthur and Kenney, though not until the back of the Sanananda defences was broken and their collapse a matter of only a few days.

His exertions in New Guinea had run some of the flesh off his body, and he looked as hard as teakwood. He was fitter than he had been at any time since the war began, probably as fit as he had ever been, even if his step had lost the spring of youth.

One man was a trifle disconcerted at Blamey's reappearance on the mainland. That was MacArthur.

"You know, Fred," MacArthur told Shedden, "I left him to take the final bow, and here he has come back to Australia!"

If Blamey knew of MacArthur's displeasure, he was not concerned about it. He had never been much of a hand at taking bows. It was one of his deficiencies for the *rôle* of a popular leader.

14

LONG WAY TO TOKYO

1

NOBODY knew better than Blamey did that there were men on each side of the Federal Parliament, including one or two members of War Cabinet, who would have liked to put his head on the block. Even when he came back to Australia with the victory of Papua in his pocket they were still thirsting for his blood. If he had feared them he would have played the part of the dedicated commander working twenty-four hours a day for victory. Typically, he did nothing of the kind. When he had cleared up an accumulation of urgent administrative matters he went off on the last day of January to fish at Wonboyn, on the south coast of New South Wales.

Wonboyn had long been one of his favourite haunts. But even there he could not escape the war. He was out fishing on the estuary on February 4 when he glanced at the shore and recognised two familiar figures—Lieutenant-General Herring and Lieutenant-Colonel Carlyon. Blamey must have known that nothing but a matter of urgency could have induced them to trail him to Wonboyn; but the fish were biting, and they had to wait a couple of hours before he hauled in his line and had himself rowed ashore. As he stepped from the boat he glowered at Carlyon and gritted: "Can't I have a few hours' peace?"

He never did hesitate to invite the axe. He told Curtin many times, not in challenge, but in a spirit of realism, that any time the Government wished to sack him he would gladly step down. These were not idle words. The war had enabled Blamey to put himself, for some years at least, beyond the reach of financial cares. His allowances as G.O.C. of the A.I.F. in the Middle East, then as Commander-in-Chief, were adequate, if not handsome. A careful spender, who knew the value of money, he made these cover his personal living costs. Meanwhile, his army pay accumulated to his credit. His army income had risen from a rate of about £1,450 a year on his appointment to more than £2,500 on his promotion to full general's rank.

Some of his prewar investments had also prospered under the

influence of war conditions. The fortunes of a Melbourne frock shop, in which he was a partner with his friend Fred Matear, blossomed, as with so many struggling businesses of the kind, after the outbreak of war. It was now yielding a profit of some thousands a year, against the modest £100 or so it had been paying in the years before 1939. He was still a relatively poor man, but not by his own standards. He would not need to worry, even if retirement should come tomorrow.

Not that Blamey hankered to vacate the Commander-in-Chief's chair. But sometimes he grew weary of the burden, of the eternal war of attrition on the political front, of having to fight the Japanese before him and the cloak-and-dagger enemies behind him at one and the same time.

Blamey's critics were fond of saying that he would go to any lengths to cling to his powers. He was popularly supposed to be nervous of losing his post to every Australian officer who rose above the rank of brigadier. No doubt any one of four or five of Australia's senior soldiers might, if given the opportunity to do so, have risen to the challenge to his political, as well as military, sagacity thrown out by the office of Commander-in-Chief. The ineluctable fact is that Blamey did rise to the challenge. The achievements of Australian soldiers, whether in the Middle East or the Pacific, were the measure of his success. On the evidence of these, he had reason to fear nobody.

Perhaps it was one of Blamey's greatest virtues, as Commander-in-Chief, that his mind was not straitjacketed by precedent. His support of the Army's anti-waste campaign, which was conducted on distinctly unconventional lines, was an example of his disdain for orthodoxy.

The need of a vigorous effort to check wastefulness had its origin in the brain of A. N. Kemsley, soon after he was appointed Business Adviser to the Minister of the Army early in 1943. Kemsley became deeply concerned about shortages of essential commodities. These shortages were caused largely by the Americans' demands upon Australia's limited resources, and were aggravated by a spirit of wastefulness, common to wartime armies the world over, in the Australian forces. Kemsley felt that public enthusiasm for the war effort was being imperilled by a not-unfounded suspicion among civilians that, while the community at large was enduring rigid rationing, the armed forces were making little attempt to economise in the use of many essential items.

He went to Blamey. He did not do so without some trepidation. The two were old friends of many years' standing, but Blamey never had, and never did, approve, as a principle, the existence of a Business Adviser. This post had been created by the Menzies Government late in 1940, and Kemsley was its fourth incumbent. For all his dislike

of the Business Adviser principle, Blamey had, in his discussions with War Cabinet before the appointment was made, paid high tribute to Kemsley's uncommon qualifications for the task. However, he was not readily persuaded that he should sponsor an anti-waste campaign in the Army, and Kemsley had to use all his considerable powers of eloquence to win the Old Man's agreement. Then, as always when he was convinced that a wise decision had been taken, Blamey gave the campaign his unlimited support.

At Kemsley's urging he seconded Major J. F. Barnes to direct the operation. Barnes brought to the work a skilled and practical mind. He used every artifice in the publicity expert's repertoire to drive home the message that waste was an enemy hardly less dangerous than the Japanese soldier, and one that must be as ruthlessly destroyed. He enlisted the aid of Armstrong, of the Melbourne *Argus,* a black-and-white cartoonist with no peer in Australia and with few peers in the world. Armstrong drew a series of cartoons, each a mordantly humorous indictment of one or another aspect of waste in the armed forces. For nearly a year one or another of these cartoons was published in each General Routine Order, over the signature of Blamey, as Commander-in-Chief. It is to be doubted if any other Military Orders in British history had used such a device to burn a message into the minds of officers and men. The idea was an unqualified success: the General Routine Orders carrying Armstrong's cartoons were discussed and laughed over—and heeded—throughout the Army. They achieved a result which no amount of sober-sided admonition could have done. A less imaginative, or a stiffer-necked, man than Blamey would have frowned upon what might have appeared (though it was not) a frivolous approach to a grave subject. Blamey not only accepted it: he was delighted with the whole unorthodox conception.

But in spite of his qualities, whether in the line of battle or in the vast territory of command remote from the sound of gunfire, there were still many Australians who wanted his head on a charger, and would have gloated over his fall. Such antagonists of Blamey were continually canvassing the qualifications of one general or another to replace him as Commander-in-Chief. His most formidable rival, if a most unwilling one, was Lieutenant-General Sir Leslie Morshead. Morshead returned from the Middle East with the 9th Division early in 1943. He brought with him a reputation not only as a brilliant field commander, but also as a forceful and able administrator. Here, if the Government wanted a successor to Blamey, was one made to popular order.

In fact, Blamey himself, perhaps in a mood of mild defiance, sug-

gested to Curtin that Morshead should be appointed in his stead. At his first private talk with Morshead, Blamey dropped a hint of what was in the wind. And when Morshead went to Canberra immediately afterwards, Curtin told him that War Cabinet was considering such a step. Morshead's reply was emphatic.

"No," he said. "There is only one Commander-in-Chief, and that is Blamey. If you were to appoint me, it would be the greatest calamity."

Morshead had a realistic understanding of his own great powers as a military commander, but he knew that, in certain essential qualities, he fell short of Blamey. No man was happier than he that circumstances never did require him to wear the Australian Commander-in-Chief's uneasy crown.

After his return from the Middle East he was in military eclipse for some months, as G.O.C. of 2nd Corps, which had no active *rôle* at the time, and on "special duty," which kept him largely on the mainland. This was good material for the gossips. Blamey, they said, was quietly liquidating a rival. On the contrary, Blamey was completing the grooming of Morshead for the task of succession.

He was walking with Captain R. E. Porter, his *aide-de-camp*, in the country about his Port Moresby headquarters one day in 1943.

"If anything happened to you, sir, who would be the logical man to take your place?" Porter asked.

"Who do you think?" asked Blamey.

"Well," replied Porter, conscious of the stories that were going the rounds about Morshead's "relegation" to a relatively inactive command, "I suppose General Morshead."

"Of course he would," said Blamey. "Why do you think I've got him down there on the mainland?"

"I thought," said Porter cautiously, "it was because he'd been away longer than any other general, and you wanted to give him a chance to see his family."

"Partly," Blamey told him. "But mostly it's because there is a greater war to be fought behind my back than here. Morshead has never had a chance to learn that side of the business. Anybody could fight this war up here, but I want Morshead to know the other way."

2

Victory in Papua removed an immediate threat either of invasion of the Australian mainland or of Australia's elimination from the war by Japan's establishment of naval control over South-West Pacific waters. But Papua was only a starting-point. More than two

hundred thousand Japanese troops were massed in the islands from Timor to Bougainville. It was still a long way to Tokyo.

Through 1943 and the early months of 1944 a series of operations was to be fought which would oust the enemy from Wau, Salamaua, Lae, and the Huon Peninsula. These operations were to retake the whole of the north coast of New Guinea as far as Madang, and wrest the Vitiaz Strait from Japanese control. These were to be combined operations in every sense, their success the fruit of collaboration between American and Australian naval, land, and air forces, their planning the work of American and Australian brains. The grand design was MacArthur's; but the detailed planning of the land operations was largely the work of two Australians—Blamey and Major-General (later Lieutenant-General Sir) Frank Berryman, a man in whom the qualities of staff officer and field commander were delicately balanced.

Apart from his military skill, Berryman had a special talent which made him of high value to Blamey, and Australia, in the circumstances of the time. He understood the Americans, and they understood him. He talked their language, though with an Australian accent: he had a knack of avoiding friction, without sacrifice of Australian dignity or interests. It was an achievement of no mean order, in the light of America's preponderant contribution to the overall forces under MacArthur's control. It was easy for a careless word or a thoughtless gesture to disturb the equilibrium of Australian-American relationships.

An example of how simply a rupture could be caused occurred when the Australian Government was considering recommendations for the award of honours to American and Australian commanders at the end of the Papua campaign. Curtin's original proposal was that MacArthur should be created Knight Commander of the Bath, Kenney Companion of the Order of the Bath, and Eichelberger Commander of the Order of the British Empire. He was on the point of recommending these honours when he learned that Lieutenant-General George H. Brett, the American who had been Wavell's deputy until the fall of Java, was to be awarded the K.C.B. for his services in that disastrous campaign—though the disasters were not attributable to the shortcomings of Wavell, Brett, or any other of the leaders of the fighting forces.

It was a dilemma for Curtin. After the fall of Java, Brett had come to Australia, and served for a few months as MacArthur's Allied Air Forces Commander until he was displaced by Kenney. Now he was to be honoured with an award not only superior to that proposed for Kenney, but the equal of that proposed for MacArthur himself.

Curtin put the problem to MacArthur in a frank letter. Referring to the proposed recommendation for MacArthur himself, Curtin wrote: "Owing to other considerations, which I need not develop, I am unable to submit a recommendation for a higher award at this stage, yet I feel that the one proposed is not satisfactory on the basis of the comparison I have mentioned. If you were to refuse it, I would entirely agree with your decision."

MacArthur replied to Curtin in a letter whose orotund phrases left no room to doubt his indignation: "The hierarchy of award to Commanders-in-Chief has been fixed by practice of long standing, and I would not want to violate the prestige of such a distinguished office by failure to abide by the standard generally accepted by military men throughout the world. To do so would not only cheapen the office of Commander-in-Chief, but would defeat the very intent of the award. If not commensurate by common measure with awards for such an office it might well be regarded not as a commendation, but by comparison with awards to other Commanders-in-Chief as a negative gesture of indifference and even of mild disparagement rather than as a badge of merit of performance. Such a situation would cause public opinion to be not only confused and critical, but would probably be a basis of resentment, certainly among Americans, against the donor Governments.

". . . if circumstances, of which I know nothing, preclude the normal recommendation on your part of the usual recognition to British Commanders-in-Chief in the field, the latest precedent being to General Alexander in Egypt, it would be better not to attempt anything in the premise. My thanks and gratitude to Almighty God for victory in this bitter and desperate campaign is too real and too earnest to be vitiated by any failure of earthly reward."

In a separate letter to Curtin on the subject of the awards proposed for Kenney and Eichelberger, MacArthur wrote: "If you cannot see your way to recommend the customary award, I hope you will take no action in the matter. If a lower award is proffered it will tend merely to mortify these gallant and deserving officers and will cause international resentment. They would undoubtedly feel it necessary to decline."

MacArthur sent copies of the correspondence to Blamey. He pinned to them a pencilled note in his own handwriting: "The enclosed correspondence is self-explanatory, and I feel you should see it. . . . If you can do anything to prevent trouble, it would be a valuable contribution."

Blamey lost no time in seeing MacArthur. Neither of them had the slightest doubt about the nature of the "other considerations" which

Curtin had mentioned as the factor that inhibited him from recommending higher awards for MacArthur, Kenney, and Eichelberger. They saw these as part of a pattern for belittling the South-West Pacific campaign. Certain quarters in the United States, as well as in the United Kingdom, lost no chance to treat the MacArthur-Blamey-Kenney campaigns as episodes in a colonial skirmish which could be left to take care of itself until the war in Europe was won. MacArthur and Blamey had had to use all their ingenuity to solve the problems this spirit of indifference had created. If they did not have to build bricks without straw, at least they had to make the straw go a very long way. By 1943 they were sick of accommodating themselves to the idea that the war in Europe and Africa was a major war, while the war in the Pacific was not.

After his talk with MacArthur, Blamey wrote a long letter to Curtin, in the course of which he said:

"I think it would be a great pity if anything were done which would be less than a generous recognition to the United States commanders, and I strongly support the view of General MacArthur that Kenney should now be granted the K.C.B. and Eichelberger the K.B.E.

". . . I feel quite certain that General MacArthur believes that the inhibition referred to in your letter is due to U.K. or War Office restrictions, and that as a senior commander of the United States Army he resents this very deeply indeed. In fact, I should say the question of an honour has ceased to have any importance in itself as such, the importance having been transferred to the implied restriction or control in the freedom of the Australian Government in relation to him in this matter.

"He, of course, is aware of the freedom with which G.C.B.s, G.C.S.I.s, &c., are strewn about by the British Government to their own servants who reach a high place, and while he resents the seeming restrictions, he resents equally the suggestion that the office of the Commander-in-Chief, American-Australian Forces in this area, is intentionally being deflated.

"I do not know what your powers or authority in this matter may be, but I regard the granting of a high honour in this case as a small thing compared to the desirability of maintaining the present high plane of good feeling, and its effect on the conduct of operations in this part of the world. At the risk of appearing impertinent, I would urge that you break through any precedent or rules to the Supreme Authority on the matter, since I feel that out of this incident, unless it is handled with generosity, lasting evil may arise."

Blamey could hardly have said more plainly that American-Australian comradeship in the South-West Pacific was in peril. A rupture

at this stage of the Pacific war would have been, for Australia anyway, unthinkable. Curtin could also read the danger signs. MacArthur was awarded the honour of Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath. Kenney and Eichelberger, though somewhat later, were each awarded the K.B.E.

Thus, one of the subterranean eruptions which inevitably occur to threaten the friendship of wartime allies ended in nothing more than an effusion of steam.

3

The Government's worst fears had been allayed by the recapture of Papua. They were never again to harass Blamey with instructions that he should go into a battle area and take command in person, as they had done when the Japanese were advancing on Port Moresby.

Some problems, born of the duality of his functions as Allied Commander and Australian Commander-in-Chief, were to remain; but now he had more freedom to play a commander-in-chief's part. He kept a close eye on the New Guinea operations, but he left tactical direction to his field commanders. Blamey formulated the pattern, and, as long as the pattern was observed, he did not interfere. If he could not trust a commander, then he sacked him. And when he did trust a commander, no weight of external pressure would persuade him to throw the man overboard. The head of more than one Australian senior commander would have fallen if Blamey had been willing to submit to such pressures.

Some of his advisers persistently told him that he erred by retaining General Savige in an active command. The urging was insistent in the Wau-Salamaua campaign, when Savige commanded the 3rd Division.

"I know," Blamey replied to a questioner. "They say I stick to Savige because he's my friend. Tell me when he has let me down in this war!"

The questioner mentioned a tale that was going the rounds: it was not Savige, but a subordinate commander, who was doing the real job at Wau-Salamaua.

"Somebody's got to do the job," Blamey answered. "If a commander can pick a good man, give him the job to do and stand behind him, that is all that matters. If he doesn't stand behind him, he's a bad commander. If anybody can prove to me that Savige has ever let me down, then Savige won't be there!"

Blamey expressed his own views by later promoting Savige to command 2nd Corps and, for five months of 1944, New Guinea Force. When he retired from the Army, he told Savige in a personal letter:

"Your services during the period of the war years present a remarkable record. It is, too, a record of achievement and of success which has been marked by great hardship, and on many occasions, as I know well, you have had to follow a lonely road. This you have done calmly and quietly, and on every occasion the event has proved you right."

He knew that his critics said of him much what Savige's critics said of Savige: he was outmoded, he was a has-been, he was too old. Blamey was mildly irritated by the whispers about his advancing years. He had every man's reluctance to admit that time was laying its fingers on him. True, his hair and moustache were whitening, but he was still endowed with phenomenal energy, uncanny resistance to everyday ills, remarkable recuperative powers after a night either of lively relaxation or work into the small hours.

He never became garrulous under the spur of liquor. The first—and almost only—sign that he was elevated was his habit of trying on everyone else's hat. He could retire at three in the morning and be up three hours later, apparently none the worse for a long night, while men ten or fifteen years younger would limp to breakfast bleareyed and jaded. "He could celebrate most of the night, then cerebrate like a perfectly balanced machine in the morning," said one of his senior officers.

On a visit to one headquarters, he appeared in the mess for breakfast at eight o'clock. Nobody was about. Another half-hour passed before a steward arrived.

"What time is breakfast here?" Blamey demanded.

"Nine o'clock, sir," said the steward.

"Give me my breakfast now," Blamey said.

He was at the table when the first officers straggled in for the morning meal. He sat like a glowering buddha as, in twos and threes, the rest of the mess members appeared. He welcomed each latecomer with some elaborately ironic salutation, which caused the hardiest to bolt his eggs in haste, and escape. Early rising became a popular custom at this headquarters after Blamey's visit.

He could never understand the normal man's fondness for the warmth of the blankets in the early hours of the morning. At Morotai he and Dan Dwyer, his personal assistant, were walking to the beach for a swim at a quarter to six one morning. Blamey's eyes travelled over the tents with their sleeping occupants.

"Dan, look at these lazy beggars still in bed!" he growled.

He took regular physical exercise as a matter of deliberate policy. A rugged hill stood behind his headquarters in Port Moresby, and nearly every evening at half-past five he would push aside his work, summon Dwyer, and scale the hill. It was so steep in places that the

climbers had to draw themselves up by clinging to trees and using all the strength of their arms.

Someone told Blamey that one of his senior officers, whose duties lay chiefly on the mainland, had joined the chorus with those who said he was getting old. He did not know if the report were true or false, but the next time the officer concerned appeared in Port Moresby, Blamey summoned him to his office.

For an hour he raked him with questions. At the end of the inquisition, the officer, who had been flying all day, wanted nothing better than to escape and restore himself with the aid of two or three stiff scotches.

But Blamey was not done.

"Well, now," he said, "every evening Dwyer and I take a walk about this time. You'd better come along with us."

Blamey led the way up the hill. He and Dwyer were both fit, because they had made the climb so many times, but before they had gone half-way, their companion was rubicund of face, pouring with sweat, and panting for breath. Blamey did not even glance back, but went on climbing, with Dwyer at his heels, and reached the summit a long way ahead of the straggler. He was standing there, staring out into the far distance, when the laggard struggled over the last few yards and scrambled up beside him.

"Well," said Blamey, "getting old?"

He had convinced at least one reputed doubter that Tom Blamey was not so old as his tally of years might suggest.

Blamey would go to such lengths as this to prove the individual critic, especially if it chanced to be a man whose good opinion he valued, wrong about him; he could rarely be bothered to lift a finger to confound his critics at large.

He had none of the faculty possessed by many successful military figures of making himself appear to be something more than a mortal man. Blamey believed he should be judged on what he did; he could never realise that a man is judged also on what he appears to be. His wife once told him he should learn some of the tricks of showmanship.

"I can't be bothered with that sort of thing," he said. "I'm here to do a job. Don't ask me to be a Hollywood soldier!"

He did many human acts, in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief, which expressed facets of his nature that would have startled any but his intimates. The mass of Australians could not be blamed for their ignorance of these things: Blamey himself refused to permit such episodes of his career to be made public. He was thus responsible for helping to foster a popular belief that he would never lift a finger unless there was something in it for Blamey. The hitherto largely

unpublished record of his exertions in what the Australian Army knows as the Whitlam Case is, alone, enough to demolish any such idea.

Blamey had nothing to gain, except the satisfaction of seeing belated justice done, by forcing the issue in the Whitlam Case, when it came to his notice early in 1944. He could have ignored it; or he could have stifled discussion of it, as many of his predecessors in high military office had done in the period of over twenty-seven years that had elapsed since Arthur Gordon Whitlam was cashiered. Nobody would have thought the worse of Blamey if he had declined to concern himself, in wartime, with so apparently trivial a matter. In fact, had he chosen to ignore it, none but members of the military hierarchy would have been aware of his unwillingness to trouble himself with the affair. But the Whitlam Case touched some sensitive area of Blamey's soul. He called it "another Dreyfus case," and resolved that nothing that he could do to right the old wrong that Whitlam had suffered should be left undone.

Whitlam was a lieutenant in the First A.I.F. In June, 1916, a British general court-martial in France convicted him on four of ten counts of having stolen and received property belonging to his brother officers. The charges related to the contents of a trunk which Whitlam had sent to Australia from Egypt in 1915—nearly a year before he was called upon, in circumstances of great haste, to answer the allegations on which he was arraigned. Whitlam's guilt or innocence turned, in practice, on the answers to two questions. Did he know that the trunk, as shipped to Australia, contained stolen property? Did his batman, who soon after the court-martial deserted the Army and disappeared, speak the truth when he swore that Whitlam himself had packed the trunk? In the event, Whitlam, then aged twenty-five, was cashiered and shipped back to Australia in disgrace.

Whitlam's military career was broken, but his spirit was not. Even before he left England for Australia he set about the task of collecting evidence which would, he hoped, cleanse his name. He could not have foreseen then that nearly thirty years were to pass before his fight for justice would end in success. Item by item, he added to the evidence which tended to prove his innocence; and through the years he repeatedly sought a re-opening of the case. As early as 1920, the late W. M. Hughes, then Australia's Prime Minister, wrote: "A *prime facie* case seems to have been made out for further enquiry." Three years later Sir Robert Garran, then Australia's Solicitor-General, recommended that Whitlam's conviction should be quashed. Other public men, many of them enjoying high political, or legal, reputation rallied to Whitlam's support. But every time the citadel seemed about to fall Whitlam and his champions met an implacable

wall: the case could not be re-opened, said the defenders of military orthodoxy, because if a precedent were established in Whitlam's case, hundreds of other cashiered officers might clamour for a like privilege!

If Whitlam ever despaired, at least he did not waver. In 1926 he journeyed to South Africa expressly to find his old batman, whose evidence before the court-martial had been the main factor in his downfall. He found the deserter living in a Durban slum, and wrung from him a statement, which was recorded in the form of a statutory declaration. Here, at last, Whitlam believed, was evidence which would clear his name. Back in Australia, he once more petitioned the Army for the quashing of his conviction: he offered the runaway batman's statement as the definitive link in the chain of new testimony. The Army decided, after deep meditation, that Whitlam might have a "pardon"—for an offence he had not committed. Whitlam refused this dubious mercy, and fought on.

The years drifted by, and it must have seemed to Whitlam that his last hope of finding justice was all but extinguished. Then, in the last days of 1943, his solicitors made a renewed appeal on his behalf. The documents in the case, now a massive file, came under the eye of Major-General C. E. M. Lloyd, Adjutant-General. Lloyd, a barrister, as well as a regular soldier, was horrified when he read the story. He directed the file to Blamey. Blamey referred it to the scrutiny of three of Australia's most distinguished legal men—Lieutenant-General Sir Edmund Herring, later Chief Justice of Victoria; Brigadier Eugene Gorman, K.C.; and Harry Alderman, K.C. Each of these men told Blamey that, in his opinion, the documents in the file established Whitlam's innocence.

Now Blamey acted. If any of the Army officers who had resisted Whitlam's earlier appeals for justice ever read Blamey's recommendation for the quashing of the conviction, they must have writhed for weeks. Of the ex-batman's evidence to the court-martial, Blamey wrote: "No witness has ever given evidence so vulnerable. Cross-examination would have decisively exposed its great weaknesses." Of the bland argument that the re-opening of the Whitlam case would establish a precedent for other like applications, Blamey wrote: "I can only say of this most monstrous contention, that if there are other cases such as that of ex-Lieutenant Whitlam, the sooner they are rectified the better."

The *Commonwealth Gazette* of July 23, 1944, published a declaration by the Governor-General-in-Council expunging Whitlam's conviction from the record, and restoring Whitlam's name to the Reserve of Officers list from the date of his conviction twenty-eight years earlier. Whitlam had Blamey and Lloyd, and his own unflagging

tenacity of purpose, to thank for the righting of the injustice he had suffered.

Blamey, had he chosen to do so, might have caused the circumstances of the affair to be used to throw a warm and human spotlight upon himself. For the story of the Whitlam Case would have found a position on the front page of every Australian newspaper. Instead, Blamey damned suggestions that it should be used to elevate him in public esteem. A newspaper account was published, but only as the outcome of a friendly conspiracy between General Lloyd and a Melbourne newspaperman, Reg Glennie. Lloyd knew that Blamey would be incensed if he should ever learn how the story had reached the Press, and he heavily censored Glennie's report, with the specific purpose of concealing its source. To do so, Lloyd inevitably had to minimise Blamey's, as well as his own, part in the affair. If Blamey ever guessed that he had been limelighted, however mildly, he never referred to the mysterious leakage of information on the Whitlam Case.

He would have no truck with American-style ballyhoo. To him, it was another name for misrepresentation. He detested the American trick of using publicity to spotlight individuals, especially generals or other senior officers, as if they were circus acrobats. He believed that such methods did little to help a military operation, and that the end result was often to foment bad feeling between men who should be working amicably for a common purpose.

"Where A and B together bring about a certain result," he once told a friend, "A gets the credit and B gets angry. One of these days you will find that B deliberately lets A down, in an effort to get some credit for himself or at least to see that A gets none, and thus in a left-handed kind of way square the ledger."

For Blamey knew that, in war as out of it, men are human. They do not shed their personal ambitions and jealousies because they are fighting for their country's survival. For this reason he permitted only the severest minimum of publicity to individual officers; and he was never happy about even such limited publicity as individual officers did get.

"Why a particular general?" he once asked. "Or why a particular colonel? Why, for that matter, not a particular private soldier? Each one is necessary to success in the field."

He would not believe the argument that the Australian soldier and the Australian public should know him as an individual, not as a military abstraction. On a visit he made to Western Australia in 1943 a report of a small human episode in which he spontaneously praised a piece of quick thinking by two private soldiers on a river-crossing exercise found its way into the Press. He turned on one of his camp-followers in fury.

"This is your doing," he fumed. "I'm not going to be publicised! I've seen too much of it in the American Press, and I'm not going to have it."

The basic reasons for his dislike of ballyhoo were understandable, but his failure to distinguish between ballyhoo and legitimate information the Australian public should have had about military operations was not. It represented an error of judgment. It was to involve Blamey, in the last year or so of the war, in trouble with the Government, which would never have arisen had his mind been as fluid on this question as it was on most of the problems of his command.

4

He worked like a tiger throughout 1943, whether he was in New Guinea or moving about the Australian mainland. He had the restlessness of the man who burns with energy of body and of mind. He was spending about thirty hours a month in the air, and no Australian military establishment, however remote from a capital city, was safe from him. When he smelt slackness, whether in a forward unit or a soldiers' recreation club in a rear area, in a superior headquarters or a mainland staging camp, heads rolled.

Plenty of Australians parrot the charge that Blamey demanded guts of other men but had no guts himself. His personal staff never found him short of courage, whether physical or moral. He believed that only a fool rushed upon the enemy's sword, unless he could win some advantage for his side by doing so; but if duty required it of him, he was not slow either to risk his skin or expose himself to public dislike.

In New Guinea he was inspecting an operation by a unit of Vasey's 7th Division. The Australians were fighting to clear a rice dump, and the Japanese were stubbornly disputing the issue. Vasey, a man who throve on danger, drew Carlyon aside and said:

"I think this is far enough up for the Old Man."

Carlyon hoped Blamey shared the view. Blamey didn't. He went plodding on until he was right among the forward troops.

Vasey was angry now. He told Carlyon he would take no further responsibility for Blamey's safety.

"What are you here for?" he demanded. "Can't you take the old bastard out of it?"

Carlyon suggested to Blamey that perhaps he should watch the operation from a more commanding and less exposed position. But Blamey, as always, refused to leave the spot until he had seen everything he wished to see.

Physical courage is a spectacular, but not uncommon virtue; moral

courage is unspectacular, but rare. Blamey had it in abundance. He could face mass hostility without turning a hair. He knew he was generally disliked in Sydney, for no reason anyone has ever been able to define. Yet on Anzac Day, 1943, he deliberately chose to march in Sydney. He marched not as Commander-in-Chief, but as a veteran of the 2nd Battalion, which he had commanded for a few weeks in the first war. It was an example of the defiance of public opinion he had practised throughout his life. He had expected coldness, and he was not disappointed. Sydney treated him with the barest minimum of frigid politeness.

Of course, Blamey cared about it. He bruised as easily as any man. The difference between him and most men was that he invited bruises, then hid them under an outer skin of pretended indifference. Perhaps he did such things because he liked to demonstrate that he could command himself as he commanded other men.

His power of command was prodigious. Few men ever tried to stand against it. The record of the last war mentions only one member of the Australian Army who defied Blamey's will and won the day. And he was not an Australian.

Ching was one of six Chinese, refugees from Pacific islands overrun by the Japanese, who were enlisted in the Australian Army to work in Blamey's Advanced Headquarters mess in Brisbane. Five were mess servants, Ching was Blamey's personal attendant. The six Chinese, who liked to wear their Digger hats undented, their boots half-laced, and their shirts hanging outside their trousers, never did become soldierly figures. But they were in every legal sense Australian soldiers, earning Army rates of pay, and subject to Army discipline.

They were happy at first, but as the weeks went by they grew restive. Other Chinese refugees were serving in an American headquarters at Mount Isa. They looked dashing in smart American uniforms when they came to Brisbane on leave, and they had plenty of money to spend, because U.S. Army rates of pay were more generous than Australian. They bragged to Blamey's Chinese of their good and prosperous life, and infected their listeners with a desire to change to the service of Uncle Sam. Blamey's Chinese murmured, but there was nothing they could do about it. They had enlisted in the Australian Army, and in the Australian Army they must stay until the war ended. Or so their Australian officers believed. They failed to reckon with Oriental cunning.

One night Major Dwyer, Blamey's personal assistant, told Ching to be ready early next morning to leave for Melbourne by plane.

"No go Melbourne," said Ching.

"Oh, don't be silly," said Dwyer. "You be ready on time."

"No go Melbourne," Ching repeated, in the same impassive voice.

Next morning Ching was pottering about Blamey's billet in his day-to-day working garb.

"Look here," Dwyer told him, "you'd better get ready, Ching. We're leaving at a quarter to eight."

"No go Melbourne," said Ching.

At breakfast Dwyer told Blamey he feared they would have some difficulty in persuading Ching to board the plane.

"Nonsense," said Blamey. "Give him a prod with a bayonet, and he'll move fast enough."

There was no sign of Ching when Blamey and Dwyer finished breakfast. Blamey, in person, went seeking him.

"Come on, Ching," he said. "We're leaving."

"No go Melbourne," said Ching.

"What's this!" Blamey exclaimed in a voice that would have awed a major-general. "Come along now, on the instant!"

"No go Melbourne," said Ching.

Blamey roared for Dwyer to call out the guard and instruct them to put Ching on board the plane. He and Dwyer were waiting on the airfield when two members of the guard appeared, dragging Ching between them.

"Reporting with Ching, sir," they said.

They bore scars of battle. So did Ching. The guard had gone to the mess to seize him, and he and his five compatriots had joined forces. The guard, all old soldiers, were hard-bitten men, but the Chinese knew jiu-jitsu, and for a few minutes they had the upper hand. It was only when the guard was reinforced by more Australians, attracted by the din, that the Chinese were overpowered, and Ching was marched away.

So Ching went to Melbourne, after all. He sat throughout the trip, nursing his bruises and staring impassively into space. In Melbourne, they drove to Blamey's home, and Dwyer told Ching to prepare a meal.

"No get meal," said Ching.

Dwyer gave up. He knew when he was beaten. Blamey gave up, too. For the only occasion in his life, a private soldier had got the better of him. The provosts took Ching away, and he was sentenced to twenty-eight days. When he had served his time he was discharged from the Australian Army, and transferred to the service of the Americans at Mount Isa.

He probably never guessed he had won a victory that no white Australian soldier, whether officer or man, would have dared to dream about.

15

THE SHAPE OF VICTORY

1

WHEN Blamey went to London with Curtin for the 1944 Imperial Conference, victory in the Pacific war was no longer a mere possibility; it was now a virtual certainty, however bitter the fighting that might lie ahead. It shaped itself as MacArthur, under whose command the South-West and South Pacific areas had been united in June, 1943, reached out and added to his earlier gains by seizing bases in New Britain, in the Admiralty Islands, in Morotai, and right along the north coast of Dutch New Guinea.

Blamey had reason to be satisfied with the part he and his Australian soldiers had played in achieving this result. But his satisfaction was tinged with apprehension. The land forces, as well as the sea and air forces, operating in the South-West and South Pacific were now preponderantly American—heavily so. Blamey foresaw that the Australian land forces could easily lose their identity and become a second-line army, reserved for second-line tasks.

He was still nominally Allied Land Forces Commander, but the title had lost much of its significance. Blamey was to write later:

"My transfer to the active command of operations in New Guinea in September, 1942, led to the complete termination of any idea of a properly constituted Allied Land Headquarters.

"For the remainder of the year I was actually in command of the combined Allied forces operating in the field, but from the end of the campaign for the capture of Papua the American Army Command was completely separated from the Allied Land Forces Headquarters, and command was exercised directly by General MacArthur, through the headquarters of the South-West Pacific Area.

"I was amazed some time later to learn from Mr. Curtin that this quiet side-stepping of the original arrangement had been done without the knowledge of the Australian Government.

"The failure to carry out the original conception acted detrimentally to the Australian Army, as the Supreme Command was naturally more interested in providing the requirements of the whole of the

American forces, and was able to bring great pressure to bear on the various Australian authorities in making the necessary provision.

"For the Australian Army the position was very different. It had to run the gauntlet of many and devious channels, and was always behind the Americans, and in several important matters obtained what it could from the resources of its own country after the Americans had had the pick of the market."

Of course, Blamey's unwillingness to see the Australian Army engulfed in the clouds of glory trailed by the mighty U.S. war machine was not the product of pure patriotism—that is, if patriotism is ever pure, if it is ever anything more than an enlargement of individual self-seeking, whether expressed in terms of a desire for adventure or an appetite for immortality. Blamy's place in history was inseparable from the Australian Army's place in history: the Australian Army's eclipse would mean his eclipse. But his motives were not rooted in individual ambition alone.

Blamey had a bigness of outlook such as few Australians have possessed. He believed that Australia could exert a commanding influence on Pacific affairs after the war, but he knew his country's capacity to do so would be diminished if its fighting services were to fade out in the closing phases of the war. Or, more accurately, if they were to be faded out. The range of his thinking on the subject was indicated in a paper he sent to Curtin on February 7, 1944.

"The situation of Australia's island colonies in the Pacific at the opening of 1944 is one of historic importance and historic opportunity," Blamey wrote. He then went on to make a minute analysis covering eighteen foolscap pages. He observed:

"The whole field is one of tremendous political vistas, revealing themselves to foresight and imagination, although in the foreground are immediate difficulties requiring much political, diplomatic, and administrative ingenuity to overcome.

"An informed and forward-looking Australian policy may be a main instrument capable both of assisting to correct the past abuses which have accompanied Imperialism in the Pacific colonies and to control the powerful forces of commercialism operating in the colonies.

"The Australian Government, placed in important respects strategically, politically, and economically in a position to control some objectives of the possible Pacific rivalries of the U.S. and other powers around and interested in the Pacific Basin, has a unique opportunity to make an interesting reversal of the normal, and use policy on the highest moral level as a justified weapon of power politics to protect not only the future of the native peoples of the Pacific, but the strategic security of Australia.

"It may be that we are confronted with one of those rare moments in history when morality coincides with expediency . . .

"Militarily, the operations in the Timor-Solomons arc have revealed, as though a screen had suddenly been removed, the world importance of these areas strategically.

"The chain of islands from Timor to the Solomons and New Caledonia is the forward base area from which an Asiatic enemy can organise his forces to isolate or attack the Australian mainland, and the forward base area from which Australian and Allied forces can attack his supply lines, prevent or harass his concentration and deployment, and gain invaluable time for our full mobilisation and the arrival of help from overseas.

"The battle for Australia can possibly be won by either side in the island chain. Success in war is often a matter of positions, and it is evident that the Commonwealth must select base areas in the forward island region, and maintain standing forces there for the future, as a very minimum of elementary defence measures for our safety.

"It may be assumed that there will be other Pacific conflicts in the next half-century, for the reason that the fundamental interests of U.K., U.S., U.S.S.R., China, Japan, and other nations, in relation to the control of axial centres and undeveloped economic areas, still require adjustment, and doubtless will provoke forceful measures to that end.

"Such adjustments may or may not be carried out through formal processes of war, although they are likely to be; but at the least they will lead to conflicts in which the outcome will be governed largely by constant strategic factors . . .

"Australia would have learned nothing from the sacrifices of this war if the world strategic importance of the whole New Guinea theatre had not become overwhelmingly obvious to the nation.

"In such circumstances the military occupation and administration of the area can be regarded as the first phase of colonial policy, and actually inseparable from it."

Blamey's vision of Australia's place in the Pacific of the future was at the root of his incessant preaching that New Guinea must be developed. He saw it as the Australian mainland's shield against attack from the north in any Pacific conflict.

"Two factors impress me in relation to New Guinea," he wrote as early as 1942. "The first is the admirable way in which the native question has always been handled in regard to control, although there are weaknesses. The second is the deplorable way in which everything else has been done in the country."

He considered two major projects must be undertaken by the Aus-

tralian Government in New Guinea. One was a programme of economic development on a grand scale. The other was the economic and educational advancement of the natives. He did not sentimentalise over the "Fuzzy-Wuzzy angels"; he simply believed their cultural development and their incorporation in Australia's social system were indispensable to fit them for the task of contributing a full share to the weight of responsibility Australia ought to carry in the post-war Pacific.

As a military commander, he did what he could to lay the foundations of a stronger economy for the island. He caused quinine and tea plantations to be established. He also directed that experimental coffee plantings should be attempted in the central highlands. He wished to import working elephants, and even made inquiries in India about the prospects of obtaining suitable animals.

"It's wicked that fifty men should have to struggle along carrying loads that one elephant could bear," he said.

He saw not only New Guinea, but Australia and Australians, as ill-equipped for the tasks ahead. The low educational level of the Australian soldier, though it was somewhat above that of the average American or British soldier, appalled him. Largely self-educated himself, he could not comprehend the incuriosity of most Australians about the essentials of their own country's history, geography, and economy. He held that the standard of Australian education must be raised if Australia were to play anything much more effective than a spectator's part in the future of the Pacific. For this reason he was, behind the scenes, one of the most ardent supporters of the plan to establish a national university in Canberra.

Among the ideas Blamey put to John Curtin was one that an institute for medical research should be established in Canberra. It was Blamey's hope that Australia would be able to induce Sir Howard Florey, the South Australian-born Professor of Pathology at Oxford, and the world's chief pioneer in the development of penicillin, to undertake the direction of such an institute. Blamey urged Curtin to invite Florey to visit Australia, and Florey took up the invitation in the second half of 1944. Blamey sent Lieut.-Colonel (later Colonel) A. A. Conlon, head of his Directorate of Research, to see Florey in Adelaide, and himself had a long talk with Florey in Melbourne. In the event, Florey was unable to accept the post of director of the John Curtin School of Medical Research, but he agreed to pay regular visits to Canberra to advise on the development of this school, and of the national university in general. And the advice he offered after his 1944 visit had an important influence on the shaping of the plans for the national university.

Blamey's conception was expressed to Curtin in a letter written in October, 1944:

"I am more and more impressed with the necessity for putting a stop to the drainage of outstanding Australians to posts in other countries. A provision of funds in the vicinity of £200,000, apart from the substantive value of the work done for the money, would more than repay the nation if it merely had the effect of retaining these Australian scientists and providing them with the necessary conditions of work on Australian soil.

"There will be very little future for Australian science if the drainage continues, and it can be said with assurance that adequate provision for the employment of Australians of world rank in Australian laboratories would have the effect of energising and enhancing the quality of Australian contributions in nearly every field of intellectual endeavour.

"It must be borne in mind that in Great Britain and elsewhere the paramount importance of contemporary science, both from a wartime and reconstruction point of view, has been so fully recognised that it will be possible to get the best men to work under Australian conditions only if the facilities offered for work are better than those offered in the older countries. This is Sir Howard Florey's own view. . .

"He is himself an Australian who has been unable to find the necessary facilities for work on his own soil, and has a deep sympathy with the struggles that Australia is undergoing to maintain her position in the comity of civilised nations.

"It cannot be said that he is uncritical of the state of affairs that he finds existing here, but such criticisms as he has expressed are measured and constructive."

Not one in ten thousand of Blamey's fellow-Australians dreamed that he harboured such ideas. He was looking far beyond the end of the war while most Australians were looking no further than the next battle.

It was not surprising, then, that when he and Curtin left Sydney in the U.S.S. *Lurline* for the United Kingdom, *via* the United States, on April 5, 1944, his restless mind was busy with the problem of how best to keep the Australian Army in the forefront of the Pacific war. He considered it an essential step in the staking of Australia's claim to a position of influence in the postwar Pacific.

2

It was nearly twenty years since Blamey had seen London. He found it stripped for battle, rationed, blacked-out, scarred by four

and a half years of war, but essentially unaltered, from the sound of the Cockney voices to the springtime leafing of the trees on the Thames embankment.

These were busy days for delegates to the Imperial Conference—the first meeting of British Commonwealth Prime Ministers and their principal advisers since the outbreak of the Second World War. Representatives of Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, India and Rhodesia, as well as Australia, met Churchill and members of the U.K. War Cabinet for the formal opening session at 10 Downing Street on Monday, May 1.

If Churchill recalled Blamey as the intractable Australian who had caused Auchinleck so much bother in the Middle East by insisting on the relief of the Australian garrison of Tobruk, he gave no sign of it when they met. And Blamey liked Churchill from the first moment. Of course, they had much in common, including the dash of gangster blood indispensable to the fighting-man.

Most of the British Commonwealth's most notable men of their time were gathered at 10 Downing Street for a late afternoon party on the Thursday after the conference opened. Major Dan Dwyer, who had accompanied Blamey to the United Kingdom as his personal assistant, became mildly worried as the hour grew later: he could not find Blamey.

"Do you know where General Blamey is?" Dwyer asked a footman.

"Is he a short, thick-set man?" the footman asked.

Dwyer nodded.

"Then, sir," said the footman, "I think you will find him in the den with Mr. Churchill."

He led the way to the den, and Dwyer knocked on the door. A voice told him to enter, and he pushed open the door. Churchill and Blamey, a bottle of scotch between them, were talking world strategy. Whatever their past differences about the powers of British commanders-in-chief and the disposition of the A.I.F., there was not the palest shadow of hostility between them now.

It was a time of some tension in high political and military circles in the U.K. The final preparations were being made for the invasion of Western Europe, which began with the D-day assault upon the Normandy coast on June 6. Blamey was permitted to go where he pleased and see whatever he chose. He all but ran the legs off Dwyer on his journeys about the country to examine the secret equipment which had been made ready to enable Eisenhower's armies to seal Germany's doom in Western Europe.

He saw Montgomery, of course. Montgomery talked, and Blamey listened. It was hardly surprising that Montgomery, with D-day

approaching, should have been preoccupied with Western Europe; but Blamey was mildly surprised at the dynamic little man's complete incuriosity about the Pacific war. However, he left Montgomery's Hammersmith headquarters with a deeper understanding of the mental attitude which had bothered him and MacArthur—not so much a refusal to admit that the Pacific war was important as an unawareness that it was part of the world war at all.

But there was one house in England in which Blamey discovered the Pacific war was everything, and the coming affair in Europe no more than a scrap with little bearing on the course of history. This was his Aunt Bessie Cardell's house in Newquay, Cornwall. The old lady was in her hundredth year, and all but blind, but her mind was still alert. And wherever Blamey turned, it seemed he faced a picture of himself staring at him from wall, what-not, or occasional table. For Mrs. Cardell, there was only one general in the war, and that was poor Richard's boy, Tom, who had crossed the world to drink a cup of tea with her.

3

Blamey returned to Australia in the second half of June to find public curiosity still simmering over the somewhat precipitate retirement of Lieut.-General Gordon Bennett from active military service. Bennett had ended his Army career in a letter, dated from his 3rd Corps Headquarters, Western Australia, on April 4, 1944, and directed to Blamey. It was delivered, by a coincidence strange in the extreme, to Blamey's Melbourne headquarters a few hours after he left Sydney in the *Lurline* on the first stage of his journey to the U.K.

Bennett's letter said:

"I have given serious consideration to our recent conversation, in which you advised me that you would not recommend me for any operational command, giving as your reasons:

"(I) That any such appointment would be unpopular with the public.

"(II) That I had been associated with the failure in Malaya.

"(III) That, in your opinion, I made a serious mistake in escaping from Malaya.

"(IV) That you had younger officers who now had experience in operations against the Japanese, and whom you intended to appoint.

"I consider my past record and my seniority, as well as my experience in Malaya against the Japanese, justify my expectation for a command which will take me into active fighting, especially if such fighting could possibly be in Malaya.

"It is not my desire to fill an administrative post gradually

diminishing in importance. At present my field troops consist of two brigades only, and it would appear that further reductions are likely.

"I therefore request to be relieved of my command and returned to civil life, and ask that the date of the termination of my appointment be the 15th April, 1944. . . ."

General Northcott, Chief of the General Staff, was carrying out the Commander-in-Chief's administrative duties in Blamey's absence, and Bennett's letter was referred to him. The papers were seen by Forde, who was acting as Prime Minister in Curtin's absence; by Senator J. M. Fraser, Acting Minister of the Army; and by other members of the War Cabinet; and a letter detailing the circumstances of Bennett's request was hurried to Blamey in Washington.

By the end of April Bennett's retirement was approved, and he was back in civilian life. Bennett was quoted by a Sydney newspaper interviewer as having said:

"I do not want to get out of the Army during the war, but I have been frozen out. I did not indulge in any intrigue or low cunning, and as a result I have been left. My ambition is not to become one of the chairborne troops. I do not withdraw at this stage of the war from the forces willingly. My one most earnest desire is to take my place in the fight against Japan."

It had been obvious for many months that some such *dénouement* of the Bennett affair was likely. Bennett's reputation was under a shadow from the time he escaped from Singapore within a few hours of the capitulation of the British forces in Malaya on the night of February 15, 1942, leaving command of the 8th Division to Brigadier (later Major-General) Cecil Callaghan. Bennett reached Sydney on March 1, and next day flew to Melbourne. He described in his book, *Why Singapore Fell*, the events which followed:

"Then straight to Victoria Barracks, where I called on General Sturdee, Chief of the General Staff. To my dismay, my reception was cold and hostile. No other members of the Military Board called in to see me. After a few minutes' formal conversation, Sturdee told me that my escape was ill-advised, or words to that effect . . .

"Later I attended the War Cabinet, to whom I gave the story of the fall of Singapore. The Prime Minister was friendly, and made a short but kind speech, thanking me for my work in Malaya, and assuring me of the confidence of the Government in me. I then broached the subject of the escape and the criticism from a certain quarter . . . The Prime Minister and other Ministers assured me they were quite satisfied that I had taken the right step."

Curtin and the other members of War Cabinet were apparently content that Bennett had followed the path of duty in leaving Singa-

pore. When Blamey arrived in Australia from the Middle East he found among his letters one from Forde, Minister of the Army, on the subject of Bennett's future. Forde wrote:

"I understand it is his ambition to occupy a much more important position in the way of a fighting command, and I want you to consider his claims, and be able to make a recommendation to me on your arrival in Canberra."

Blamey solved the immediate problem of Bennett's Army employment by giving him command in Western Australia. At that time, early in 1942, Western Australia was an area with possibilities. It was conceivable that the Japanese would attempt an invasion of North-West Australia. As time went on, any such threat to Western Australia vanished. Bennett's command ceased to have much but a symbolic meaning. It became increasingly clear that Bennett's military career was in danger of ending on a note of anti-climax. It was a career that had been distinguished by military ability and physical courage of a high order. In the first war Bennett had won notice as a fearless infantry officer on the Gallipoli Peninsula, and had commanded a brigade for the last two years on the Western Front. Now he chafed in idleness, watching men junior to him in years and military experience being promoted to active commands.

There seemed to be a natural antipathy in the juxtaposition of the Blamey and Bennett stars. Nearly forty years earlier, Blamey, in his then recently acquired lieutenant's uniform, had been engaged in the work of supervising Victorian school cadet corps. This official supervision was then a new thing. Most school-teachers with an interest in military affairs, who had worked hard to raise their corps to a good level of efficiency, accepted the appearance of staff officers, including Blamey, with at least philosophical resignation. But a few looked upon it as an unwarrantable intrusion. One of these exceptions was a man named George Bennett, at that time headmaster of a State school in the Melbourne suburb of Surrey Hills. Bennett, then in the middle fifties, was a man of forceful character. He did not care to have this whipper-snapper of a lieutenant telling him how a cadet corps should be run, and he told Blamey so in clear terms. Since the weight of the Australian Government was behind him, Blamey won the dispute. But the words that had been spoken rankled with both men. Gordon Bennett was George Bennett's son.

Gordon Bennett himself and Blamey had a more or less bitter personal brush in the first war. When Blamey was G.S.O. I of the 1st Division in France he issued orders for an operation by Bennett's 3rd Brigade. Bennett complained that the orders were astray in

certain vital particulars. The dispute left a spirit of resentment which did not die with the passing of time.

But there is nothing to support a charge that Blamey relegated Bennett to Western Australia in a spirit of vindictiveness. His view, in the simplest terms, was that Bennett should not have accepted from the War Cabinet his acquittance for having left Malaya. Blamey believed that Bennett should not have been content to accept acquittance of anybody, except his military peers. He was not alone in this opinion. It was shared by many Australian senior officers who hardly knew Bennett, and certainly had no reason to bear him a personal grudge. It was within the power of War Cabinet to grant Bennett his acquittance. It was not within the power of War Cabinet to make the Army confirm its decision by appointing Bennett to a fighting command. This was something that Blamey steadfastly refused to do. But Blamey did not consider that lack of courage was at the back of Bennett's personal retreat from Malaya. He believed that Bennett had hurried back to Australia in the hope of being chosen as Australia's commander-in-chief; or if not commander-in-chief, then commander of the forces in New Guinea. Blamey was convinced, rightly or wrongly, that Bennett's aim had been to reach Australia ahead of his chief rival in the Australian military field—Blamey himself. In fact, Bennett did reach Australia more than three weeks in advance of Blamey.

Bennett asked Blamey for an active command at more than one personal interview. Before one such interview he told Major-General Lloyd, Adjutant-General, "I'm going to see Blamey and demand a corps in the field." Bennett saw Blamey and made his demand. Blamey was adamant. He sent Bennett back to Lloyd, to whom he telephoned and said:

"Tell him if he wants to resign he'd better do so. I won't touch him."

The war had eighteen months to run when Bennett retired. The controversy about the circumstances of his going continued to bubble up—in Parliament, in the columns of newspapers, in private conversations every once in a while. Such discussion was disconcertingly inconclusive. Australians were divided into two camps on the issue.

When Japan fell, Major-General Callaghan, to whom Bennett had committed command of the 8th Division when he escaped from Singapore, was released from his prison camp. In Morotai, Callaghan handed Blamey a letter written by Lieutenant-General A. E. Percival, the British general who was G.O.C. Malaya at the time of the surrender. Percival's letter said:

"I have to report that Major-General H. Gordon Bennett, G.O.C., A.I.F., Malaya, voluntarily and without permission, relinquished the

command of the A.I.F. on February 15, 1942, the date on which the capitulation of the British Forces in Malaya took place. . . ."

Percival's assertion that Bennett had left his command "voluntarily and without permission" could not be ignored. There is no reason to suppose that Blamey wished to ignore it. In any event, it was his duty to take action.

Since March, 1942, when War Cabinet had seen fit to prejudge the issue, after hearing Bennett's statement on his return from Malaya, a body of new evidence, which could not be locked away in a convenient vault, had accumulated. It consisted not only of Percival's letter, but also of the 8th Division's records, which had been preserved in Singapore, and statements by divisional staff officers and subordinate commanders released from captivity.

Two courses were open to Blamey. As Commander-in-Chief he could personally weigh the evidence and return his own finding; or he could order the assembly of a court of inquiry. Blamey decided in favour of a court of inquiry, which is not a judicial body, though it has complete judicial independence, and on October 10 he issued an order setting it up. He was viciously attacked for having done so. The attacks came from many quarters. The most vehement took the form of a broadcast by Allan Fraser, Labour M.H.R. for Eden-Monaro, who said that Blamey's action suggested "a complete contempt for parliamentary government." Much of the criticism was in this vein. It overlooked the fact that the Army has a right, not to say an obligation, to control the discipline of the officers and men who compose it, party politicians notwithstanding. A general, no less than a private, is subject to such discipline. There was also an outcry because the court of inquiry sat in private, with the Press excluded. The court had no option in the matter. Australian Military Regulations, made under the Defence Act, preclude such proceedings from being open to the public.

The court was composed of Lieutenant-General Sir Leslie Morshead (president) and Major-Generals V. P. H. Stantke and George Wootten. It sat in Sydney from October 26 to October 30, and heard evidence from nine witnesses, including General Callaghan. General Bennett did not give evidence, nor did he call witnesses. He and his legal representative appeared when the court assembled, but withdrew as a mark of protest against the nature of the proceedings. The court of inquiry found that Bennett "was not justified in handing over his command or in leaving Singapore." The report was delivered to Blamey, who submitted it to the Government for a decision on what action should be taken.

The Government appointed Mr. Justice Ligertwood, of the Supreme

Court of South Australia, to conduct a public inquiry. His Honour began hearing evidence on November 26. His task was not done until December 13. In his report, released early in January, he found that Bennett was "not justified in relinquishing his command and leaving Singapore," but added: "His decision to escape was inspired by patriotism, and by the belief that he was acting in the best interests of his country."

There can have been few Australians who doubted the purity of Bennett's motives. There is no evidence that Blamey himself doubted it. But purity of motive is not the only quality required of a soldier who aspires to exercise high command.

4

Men close to Blamey noticed that when he returned from the U.K. in 1944 he seemed less intent on pleasing MacArthur than he had shown himself in earlier phases of their collaboration in the South-West Pacific. Some of them put it down to his weariness after five years of war, others to his preoccupation with the prospect of his own theatre command.

General Berryman called to see Blamey in Melbourne on July 4. Berryman at this time was G.O.C of 1st Corps. He had earlier commanded 2nd Corps in the Huon Peninsula campaign, and had had the satisfaction of hearing no less a personage than MacArthur describe his work as "very brilliant." Although Berryman was a staff officer of uncommon ability, he preferred to command in the field, and he was somewhat cast down when Blamey told him that he had again been chosen for a chief of staff's role.

Then Blamey unfolded before Berryman a plan which took the sharp edge off his disappointment. Blamey told him that in London a project had been discussed for basing in Australia five British divisions, supported by strong naval and air forces. These would combine with Australian and New Zealand forces to mount an expedition which would strike northward out of Darwin to fight a way back to Hong Kong. It was of this army that Berryman was to be chief of staff.

Berryman saw the great implications of the plan. It would mean that a new Pacific theatre would be opened, and that Australia would be a partner with Britain and New Zealand in the reconquest of the Pacific. It would mean an enlargement of Australia's prestige, such as Australia could not hope for as the junior, the very junior, member of an American-Australian partnership.

The thing was no mere dream. It was enough of a reality to have been studied by U.K. and Australian committees in London, enough

of a reality for enormous refrigeration installations to have been begun at Darwin, to the astonishment of all but the handful of Australians who had been admitted to the secret. Even the details had been settled of where the British divisions chosen to fight from the Australian theatre should be trained in the technique of Pacific warfare. Three were to go to Atherton Tableland, the other two to the Tweed River area on the border of Queensland and New South Wales. It was hoped that the first of the British divisions would arrive in Australia by October, and be ready for operations by March, 1942. Australia would have to accommodate and feed, in all, about 675,000 soldiers, sailors, and airmen from the U.K.

Berryman could see why Blamey viewed this development with satisfaction. For the first time in the war Blamey, a man who had often had to serve as a subordinate to his military inferiors, was in line for command in a war theatre of his own. If he permitted himself a glow of satisfaction at this promised turn of the wheel, it was small wonder. For Blamey was, in the opinion of many officers who had reason to know his calibre, disproportionately large for any war-time post he held. He was, in effect, an engine which had to be artificially throttled down, because his natural powers far exceeded the requirements of his task. His intimates knew this; and even many Australians whose paths crossed Blamey's only once or twice discerned in him qualities whose existence was unsuspected by the mass of his own people. A junior officer, who had little chance to know Blamey, but was lucky enough to see him, once, examine, analyse and decide a problem which had baffled his staff, wrote after the war:

". . . those of us who saw him at work during the last war had an opportunity of seeing a great military brain at work, a brain which far outstripped the comparative importance of his command. Such a brain, an intellect really, is a complex brilliant force. . . . It works on a vast scale, mostly across a desk, it has an unerring sense for the right man, an indispensable ability to delegate authority utterly, an infinite capacity for calm, for making instantaneous decisions, no sense of regret for mistakes made, a surgical ruthlessness in dealing with inefficiency or disobedience or stupidity, a recognition of the ultimate good and an entirely unshakeable, unalterable purpose of getting there."

It would have been astonishing if the heart of such a man had not throbbed a shade faster at the prospect of exercising command in his own theatre of operations. However, in September Berryman began to have serious doubts about the establishment of the new theatre. He was at Hollandia, where MacArthur had his headquarters, and he

seized an opening to sound the Supreme Commander about the project. MacArthur shook his head.

"It will never come off," he said.

Berryman reported MacArthur's observation to Blamey, who told him to make sure he had not misunderstood the words. But when Berryman raised the question again MacArthur confirmed what he had said earlier.

Both Blamey and Berryman realised then that there would be no new theatre. It could not be created without American support, because America would have to supply the bulk of the ships required to transfer the U.K. forces to Australia. And to the United States, the plan was politically unacceptable. MacArthur, who worked on a higher level than Blamey, or even than Curtin, was in a better position than any other man in the South-West Pacific to know the American view.

So a dream that Blamey had permitted himself to cherish died an early death. But he was never a man to dash his head against a brick wall. When you could do nothing to improve things as they were, then you made the best of them. And the war had a long way to go. Or so, at least, it seemed then. The development of the atom bomb was still a close secret. For all Blamey knew, it might well be another two or three years before Japan's fanatical resistance was subdued. He certainly could not foresee that the end of the war would come in 1945. It was the Government's policy to keep Australia in the war, and it was Blamey's business, as Commander-in-Chief, to see that the Australian soldier played as effective a part in the fighting as he could —or, anyway, as he was permitted to play.

It was no simple problem that he faced as 1944 wore on and MacArthur prepared to make good the promise he had given when he left the Philippines: "I came through and I shall return."

16

END OF BATTLES

1

Some Australians flinch when they recall the words Blamey spoke to Lieutenant-General Teshima, commander of the Japanese 2nd Army, at Morotai, on September 9, 1945. They feel that Blamey violated the sporting tenet which forbids you to kick a fallen foe. On the other hand, there are many Australians who believe that Blamey said not one syllable too few or too many.

"In receiving your surrender," Blamey said, "I do not recognise you as an honourable and gallant foe, but you will be treated with due but severe courtesy in all matters.

"I recall the treacherous attack upon our ally, China, in 1938. I recall the treacherous attack made upon the British Empire and upon the United States of America in December, 1941, at a time when your authorities were making the pretence of ensuring peace.

"I recall the atrocities inflicted upon the persons of our nationals as prisoners of war and internees, designed to reduce them by punishment and starvation to slavery.

"In the light of these evils, I will enforce most rigorously all orders issued to you, so let there be no delay or hesitation in their fulfilment at your peril."

If the pudgy Teshima, blinking behind the lenses of his spectacles, had expected his task of surrendering all the Japanese forces in Borneo and the Netherlands East Indies to be a gracious ceremonial, with tea and rice wine circulating, he was disappointed. It was as merciless a symbol of defeat as Blamey could make it.

Thus at Morotai, a little more than a month after the atom bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and a week after MacArthur accepted Japan's surrender on board U.S.S. *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, the Pacific fighting formally ended for Australia. It was fitting that Blamey, who had been Australia's senior military commander throughout the Second World War, should close the ledger with his own hand.

2

Historians will argue for many years whether the battles fought by the Australian land forces in the last year of the Pacific war contributed anything to the defeat of Japan. A sad, but ineffaceable, note of interrogation stands against the record of these operations.

Did the islands campaign, which the Australian 1st Army opened late in 1944, help to shorten the duration of the Pacific war by a single hour? Did the series of assaults on Borneo, for all their excellence as military operations, hasten by a day the reconquest of Japan's brigand empire? It is to be doubted if they served any war-winning purpose whatever.

This is not to say that these operations did not demand, or that they failed to produce, the best qualities of the Australian soldier. It is among the tragedies of warfare that human courage, tenacity, and military skill are sometimes expended to gain a useless result. And the results gained by the Australian land forces from 1944 to the close of the war appear to have been useless in any influence they exerted toward the shortening of the war.

Blamey consented to the use of the Australians in these operations as a means of keeping an Australian Army in the field until the Pacific war was won. The demand upon the Curtin Government to release idle troops to civil occupations was incessant, and became nearly irresistible. Curtin himself told MacArthur, in effect, that if no better *rôle* than that of a reserve army was intended for the Australians, political pressure would cause them, or anyway a great many of them, to be released from the fighting forces.

It is hard to believe that the over-riding reason for the launching of the Australian land forces' operations in the last year of the war was other than political. It is true that there were certain non-military objectives to be gained—for instance, the liberation from the Japanese of native peoples in such territories as the Aitape-Wewak area of New Guinea. But it is a debatable point whether the attainment of such objectives was urgent enough to justify the expenditure of Australian blood and material involved.

If these operations were unjustified, Blamey must obviously carry some of the blame. There are limits beyond which a commander-in-chief may not go in pressing his government to eschew military adventures; there is also an obligation upon him to hold a balance between his government's policy and the welfare of the men he commands. Blamey, as will appear, did oppose one of the operations to which Australian forces were committed in the last year of the war; but he defended the prosecution of others with some vehemence.

Of course, it is easy to pass retrospective judgment on the merits,

or otherwise, of a military operation. It is less easy to take the decision whether, and how, such an operation should be fought. Blamey put the 1st Army into the islands campaign, and the A.I.F. into the Borneo operations, with the knowledge that MacArthur had no intention of using Australian land forces on any other front. Since MacArthur exercised supreme power over operational policy, Blamey had to accept what was offered, or see the Australian Military Forces fade out of the Pacific picture.

The story would have been altered if the A.I.F. had fought in MacArthur's Philippines operations. A combination of circumstances —and there is no evidence that MacArthur, as so many Australians believed, used a species of devilish cunning to exclude Australian troops—caused the A.I.F. to be omitted from this campaign. The consequences for Australia were unhappy, both politically and militarily.

As early as July 21, 1944, Blamey discussed with MacArthur, in detail, Australia's proposed part in the Philippines operations. MacArthur intended using two A.I.F. divisions in the assault forces, one at Leyte, and the other at Lingayen Gulf, on the coast of Luzon. Blamey bluntly told him that the plan was unacceptable. He might use the divisions as a corps, under their own corps commander, Blamey said; but he was not at liberty to use them separately. Blamey wrote to Curtin months later:

"The operation was to have been mounted under an American commander subordinate to General MacArthur and, as the bulk of the troops at that stage were to be Australian, I pointed out that the Australian Corps command and staff were highly trained and were long and well experienced, and I saw no reason why it should not be entrusted with this task.

"The plan as revealed to me required Australians to work in two separate bodies, each under American subordinate commanders.

". . . There was no adequate reason why the Australian Corps should not have been employed as a corps under its own commander, since several American corps were employed under American corps commanders during the operations, and this, presumably, was planned in advance."

Curtin was eager that Australia should help to recapture the Philippines—possibly the most spectacular series of operations undertaken in the Pacific war, since it carried the offensive in one bold leap into the heart of the Japanese ocean area. In fact, Curtin extracted a promise from MacArthur that the A.I.F. would be used, and MacArthur went to some pains in an effort to keep his word. He

even accepted Blamey's ultimatum that the A.I.F. divisions must fight under their own corps headquarters.

His plans for wresting the Philippines from the Japanese included a two-division assault on Aparri, on the north coast of Luzon, immediately before the attack at Lingayen Gulf. He nominated the 7th and 9th Australian Divisions, under their own corps headquarters, for this operation. After the opening attack on Leyte it became obvious that the Aparri operation could be eliminated: the landing at Lingayen Gulf was practicable without the costly preliminaries which Aparri would have involved. So the A.I.F. Corps was robbed of one projected *rôle*.

MacArthur tried again. He planned to use the corps in his drive across the central plains, north of Manila. Blamey recorded in a letter to Curtin a statement by MacArthur that "he would not go into Manila without the Australian Corps, whom he regarded as essential to deal with the Japanese in that area." In the event the corps was not used. The reason, as MacArthur gave it to Curtin, was that "the enemy weakness which developed in the tactical situation obviated this necessity." Blamey chose to regard this explanation as equivocal. He pointed out to Curtin that, for all the unexpected speed of the Philippines campaign, "very large American forces" were still fighting there nearly six months after the initial assault on Leyte on October 20, 1944.

However rigidly MacArthur, as an individual, tried to keep his promise to Curtin, the Americans in general were not eager that Australian land forces should steal even a little of their thunder in the reconquest of the Philippines. Two weeks before Leyte was attacked Blamey and General Berryman were discussing the prospective campaign with General Sutherland, MacArthur's chief of staff, at MacArthur's Hollandia headquarters. Sutherland, an American who showed no conspicuous sympathy with British or Australian military and political aspirations, made no secret of his unwillingness to have Australians in the forefront of the fighting.

"It would be unthinkable that the Australians should be the first troops in the Philippines," he said. "It would not be politically expedient."

The Americans were somewhat impatient of Blamey about this time. He had developed a habit of stalling awkward decisions by vanishing into some remote corner of his geographically vast command, where he could not be easily reached for consultations. It did not make American-Australian relationships any easier to manage.

"You know," one of MacArthur's senior staff officers told Berryman, "we're a bit tired of your General Blamey. When something

comes up that he doesn't like he goes off to Western Australia or disappears on a fishing trip in Victoria."

But there was no lack of cordiality between MacArthur and Blamey when, early in December, with the Philippines campaign well under way, Blamey flew to Leyte with Berryman. He conferred with MacArthur and Sutherland, and he told Berryman that MacArthur believed a hard struggle lay ahead in the Philippines.

"He'll probably want the A.I.F. to clean up Luzon," Blamey said.

But it was not to be. Though the Royal Australian Navy and the Royal Australian Air Force each made a valuable, if little publicised, contribution to these operations, the most intimate contact that the Australian Army was to have with the Philippines campaign took the form of a humble souvenir which Blamey carried back in his luggage. At L.H.Q., Brisbane, he summoned his Deputy Director of Staff Duties, Colonel Charles Spry. Spry bustled in, with a large file of papers in his hand, expecting that Blamey, after his absence in Leyte, wished to talk business.

"I didn't bring you in to talk about work, Charles," Blamey said. ". . . How old is Sam?"

Sam was Spry's son, then four years old.

"Can he read?" Blamey asked.

"Yes, sir," said Spry, wondering if the Commander-in-Chief's brain had been turned at last by its load of anxieties.

"Then I thought he might like to have this," said Blamey, groping under his desk and producing, of all things, a coconut. "It was knocked down by the American bombardment at Leyte. I've written a message on it for him."

Scrawled across the shell in Blamey's handwriting was an inscription: *To Sam from General Blamey.*

Spry carried the coconut away, marvelling at the hidden springs of kindliness in this awesome old man, who could be as hard as flint in most of his dealings, yet remember on his wartime travels to pick up a bombed coconut for a small boy he had never seen.

3

While the Americans were recapturing the Philippines General Sturdee's 1st Army was embarking upon bitter and unrewarding operations in the arc of islands stretching from Bougainville, in the Solomons, to the western frontier of British New Guinea.

Both Blamey and the Australian Government were to be freely criticised for having permitted this "backyard warfare" to be undertaken on such a scale. Perhaps they deserved criticism. Many of their severest critics were among the soldiers who had to do the fight-

ing, notably officers and men of the 6th Division in the Aitape-Wewak area. And this was not merely the healthy grouching of the normal soldier blowing off steam. It had overtones of savage resentment.

Blamey's order to Sturdee for the conduct of these operations was of an oddly inconclusive character—"by offensive action to destroy enemy resistance as opportunity offers without committing major forces." The precise meaning of this instruction has never been clearly defined.

It was on MacArthur's order that the Australians took over control of these islands areas from American troops in the closing months of 1944. This redistribution of forces was necessitated by the U.S. advance to the Philippines. At least 160,000 Japanese fighting-men, apart from 25,000 Japanese civilians, by-passed in the advance, remained in 1st Army's territory. Blamey described them as "fanatical Japanese, who will fight to the death."

In a private letter some time later Blamey made the point that he was not, as many Australians supposed, free to determine the disposition of Australian troops. He wrote: "The allocation of Australian troops to operations is entirely the responsibility of General MacArthur, and I have no real say in the matter beyond carrying out the orders I receive. While I have pretty strong feelings on certain of these allocations, I have no right to criticise them."

However, dispute about 1st Army's operations turned, not on whether the Australians should have been sent into these territories, but on the magnitude of the operations they attempted. The queries that were raised with growing insistence as time went on were: Should offensive operations in these areas have been undertaken at all? Or should the Australians have confined themselves, as the Americans they had replaced had done, to the task of containing the enemy with limited forces, and letting them, in MacArthur's phrase, "wither on the vine"?

Blamey had no faith in the willingness of the Japanese to wither. In an appreciation written in May, 1945, he said: "We are well into the second year of this policy, and the enemy remains a strong, well-organised fighting force. The result of the policy was that the enemy outside the perimeters was left in comparative peace, and developed a large measure of 'self-sufficiency' by cultivating gardens and employing natives to do so, importing seeds, and supplying critical items, such as medical supplies and signal stores, by submarine and aircraft."

One element in the motive of these operations seems to have been that Blamey's Australianism was stung by the turn of events in the Pacific. His earlier fear that the Australian land forces were to become "a second-line army reserved for second-line tasks" was

threatening to come true. The U.S. Army was taking the cream, Australia the skimmed milk.

In a letter to Curtin on April 5, 1945, contrasting the Philippines and the islands campaigns, Blamey wrote: "The present proposals envisage the complete destruction of the Japanese in the Philippines. . . . It did not appear to me to be logical that the plans should contemplate the complete elimination of the Japanese in the Philippines, and the withdrawal of Australian forces from New Guinea before a similar stage had been reached there.

"I raised the question with General MacArthur, who said his conception was that the Philippines would be the base for further movement against the Japanese, and it was essential that no Japanese should remain in these islands. I pointed out the fact that the withdrawal of Australians from New Guinea before completion of their task in such clearing up would mean they would have to return to complete it.

"In view of the intention of the American forces to destroy completely the Japanese in the Philippine Islands, it is my considered opinion that further Australian forces should not be withdrawn from New Guinea until such time as Japanese forces on Australian territory are destroyed also. . . .

"I except from this Rabaul. The Japanese forces in this region have been pressed into a comparatively small area. . . . I consider any attempt to capture this stronghold should be deferred for the present, and we should be satisfied to contain it, since we can do so with lesser strength than the enemy force there."

The "backyard war" was immensely expensive in the number of men and the value of material it absorbed. It made so large a hole in Australia's resources that there is doubt if the 7th and 9th Divisions, back at Atherton to reinforce and refit, could have been made ready in time had they been required to fight in the Philippines campaign.

There was undoubtedly some ground for Blamey's suspicion that the Americans were not anxious to spotlight any other nation's Pacific operations at this stage of the war. MacArthur's headquarters, though not necessarily MacArthur himself, chose when 1st Army had to be mentioned, to pretend that the numerical strength of the enemy forces the Australians faced was relatively small. United States Intelligence said that the Japanese in the area numbered only about 90,000. Just after the Americans handed over to 1st Army, Major-General Charles A. Willoughby, MacArthur's Chief of Intelligence, made a public statement that only 10,000 effective Japanese troops remained in Bougainville. About the same time Colonel (later Brigadier) Kenneth Wills, Blamey's Deputy Director of Military Intelligence at L.H.Q., issued an estimate that the number of Japanese

in Bougainville was at least 30,000 to 40,000. This was by no means an extravagant figure. Wills had determined it by a study of documents captured from the enemy. It was more than confirmed by later events: over 19,000 Japanese fighting men surrendered in Bougainville, after some 18,000 had been killed, or had died of wounds or sickness, in the period of 1st Army's operations against the island. However, when Wills issued his estimate he was brusquely reproved by Australian higher authority: in this instance, he was told, accuracy was not half so important as the preservation of good relations with the Americans!

The forces of 1st Army had been operating for about two months before the Australian public, and the world, were informed of the fact. And the first disclosure was made, not officially, but by P. C. Spender, who had been Menzies's Army Minister, and was at this time a private member, while he was visiting the United States!

Sturdee wrote to Blamey on January 4, 1945: "I have been anxiously awaiting some Press announcement that the Australian Army still exists in New Guinea, and it seems that the Australian public must be wondering whether we are still in the war."

It was a just observation. MacArthur's communique was the only medium by which the first release of such information was permitted to be made. Neither Blamey nor the Australian Government deserved censure for having withheld this news—though they suffered censure, individually and together, from Australians who were ignorant that the authority in such matters lay with MacArthur. It was only after pressure had been exerted by Blamey that MacArthur agreed to disclose the news in his communique of January 9.

It is still puzzling to know what reasons of security prompted MacArthur to wait so long. On his own showing, the Australians were facing an enemy who had lost any offensive capacity and could be allowed to "wither on the vine."

It almost seemed that Blamey was losing patience with the war as its last months approached. He was active enough in the preparation of the operations against Borneo, the first step toward the reconquest of the Netherlands East Indies. But he baulked when a decision on the 7th Division's assault on Balikpapan was being taken. He could see no military necessity for the capture of a point on the eastern shore of Borneo, and he advised Curtin against it.

"Don't you think you are putting the Government in a spot?" General Berryman asked him. "MacArthur has all the forces ready to do this operation, and I don't think the Government has any choice but to go on with it."

The event proved Berryman to be right. Blamey's military reasoning

was irreproachable: the capture of Balikpapan, even if there had been no atom bomb, could have had no influence on the duration of the war. But political considerations, notably the strengthening of Dutch goodwill, were overmastering.

A powerful factor in Blamey's opposition to the Balikpapan operation was undoubtedly his knowledge of MacArthur's intention of ending the war by an orthodox attack upon Japan itself. MacArthur's staff had planned an assault on Kyushu, southernmost of the Japanese main islands, for December, 1945, and a drive into Tokyo Bay about three months later. Two A.I.F. Divisions were listed to take part in the Tokyo Bay operation, and Blamey probably saw a danger that he would not be able to extricate his forces from Borneo in time to group them with the Americans for the delivery of the final blow.

These closing months of the war were not particularly happy for Blamey, or for Australia. The war was no longer a comparatively uncomplicated affair of planning battles, fighting battles, and winning battles. For Blamey, as well as for Australia, it had become a matter of waging a war within a war.

4

It is clear that if the Pacific war had lasted a year longer, Blamey would have been out of uniform and some other hand would have been controlling the Australian Military Forces.

The years seemed to have impaired his capacity to absorb criticism; or perhaps he had reached saturation point. Anyway, his concern with his critics, including certain politicians and some newspapers, became obsessional. He could no longer shrug them off; he would sit talking about them until two and three in the morning. The inhibitions Blamey's post imposed on him compelled him to refrain from making any public reply to such critics. He had to bear them with as much equanimity as he could contrive, and try to be content with the warm speeches Curtin and Forde, in the House of Representatives, and Fraser, in the Senate, made in his defence.

Curtin had never wavered in his loyalty to Blamey, though his steadfastness had been tested at times by ill-judged actions of Blamey's own. It was one thing for Curtin to defend Blamey on the floor of the House; it was another to defend him in the War Cabinet room, or in Caucus. That Blamey should be attacked by the Parliamentary Opposition was understandable. He was serving the Labour Government. Therefore, he was an inviting target. Curtin could counter such sniping, and even turn it to political advantage. But the rumblings from his own stronghold were harder to silence.

Blamey was never conspicuously tactful. His tactlessness now strengthened the hands of those Labour members, and of one or two Labour Ministers, who would have shed no tears over his retirement. In some Australian quarters responsibility for MacArthur's reluctance to release the news of the 1st Army's islands campaign was wrongly attributed to the Department of Information. Arthur Calwell, the Minister for Information, naturally defended his department. He said the blame lay upon the Public Relations section of the Army. Calwell had made a misstatement, but it was not mischievous in intent. Blamey could have corrected it simply by stating the facts. Instead, he hit back in a savage Press statement, in which he said the basis of Calwell's announcement was "a direct lie."

Blamey had his statement ready for release to the Press when he was flying from Canberra to Melbourne. Frank Sinclair, Secretary of the Army Department, was travelling with him. Blamey handed him the draft statement to read.

"It's pretty strong," Sinclair remarked.

"I know it is," said Blamey.

Sinclair suggested that it might be judicious to reframe the statement, but Blamey would not abate a word of it.

Such actions as this did not help to endear Blamey to elements in the Government which had accepted him, but without enthusiasm. There is no evidence that Calwell was ever among Blamey's sworn enemies. In fact, after a period of coolness, they repaired their differences, and some months later Blamey wrote Calwell a letter in which he expressed himself as satisfied that the remarks he had answered were "made under a misapprehension, and were not based on a lie."

But for a man who had enough public enemies already he displayed at this time an uncommon faculty for making more. Some letters he exchanged with Forde, the Army Minister, on the subject of a report Senator Fraser had prepared on Curtin's express instructions about complaints of equipment shortages affecting the 6th Division in the Aitape-Wewak operations, were neither diplomatic nor conciliatory.

Even Curtin showed a disposition in the last year of the war to question some of Blamey's advice on military matters. For instance, he was troubled by Blamey's proposal at the beginning of 1945 that Major-General George Vasey should be appointed commandant of the Royal Military College, Duntroon.

Illness had compelled Vasey some six months earlier to relinquish command of the 7th Division to Major-General E. J. Milford. Vasey was one of Australia's most spectacular, and successful, fighting commanders, and when he recovered his health the Government wished

to see him once more in an active command. In recommending Vasey's appointment to Duntroon, Blamey wrote to Curtin early in January:

"The efficiency with which Duntroon fulfils its functions depends largely on the commandant. He sets the standard and should accordingly be the best officer available. He should possess the highest professional attainments and be an officer of outstanding personality and character."

The correspondence between Blamey and the Government continued for nearly two months. The Government wanted Vasey to lead in the field. Blamey was no less set on appointing him to Duntroon. Curtin and Forde proposed that Vasey should be given command of his old division, the 7th. Blamey replied that General Milford could only consider his removal from his command to make way for Vasey "as an affront and a mark of lack of confidence."

"In my opinion," Blamey wrote to Forde, "this would be improper and unjust, and would be contrary to the rules under which army discipline is maintained. It would lead to certain antagonism between the commanders concerned and, as it is contrary to army practice, to distrust of higher authority on the part of all senior commanders."

The deadlock had not been resolved by the end of February when the Duntroon commandant, Brigadier Bertrand Combes, fell ill. A successor had to be found at once, and Blamey appointed Brigadier E. L. Vowles.

The discussion on Vasey had a tragic aftermath. He was appointed early in March to take over command of the 6th Division in New Guinea. On the afternoon of March 5, while he was flying north with his staff, the plane crashed into the sea near the mouth of the Barron River, Cairns, and Vasey was killed. Major-General R. M. Downes, who was travelling as official historian of the medical services, died in the same accident.

After the military funeral at Cairns three days later, Blamey wrote to Mrs. Vasey: "In these days we tend to forget the old 6th Division at Bardia and Tobruk, and the struggle in Northern Greece is passing into history, but to me it is very vivid, and I was really proud to pay my tribute to George. The epic of the Kokoda Trail is still very clear in most people's minds, but George's part in it can never be overemphasised."

Whether Blamey or the Government was right on the issue of Vasey's appointment, admirers of Vasey could not suppress an impulse to wish that Blamey's view had prevailed. Then one of the nation's finest soldiers would have been spared to exercise his influence on the development of Australia's postwar army.

5

A crisis in Blamey's affairs as Commander-in-Chief occurred in April, 1945. There was a certain irony about it, since it was over before Blamey knew it had arisen. It was only later that he heard the facts.

Early in April, A. N. Kemsley, Business Adviser to the Army, heard that a strong section of the Federal Labour Caucus was clamouring, if not for Blamey's blood, at least that he should be stripped of much of his power. In simple terms, the proposal was that the Military Board, which had been abolished when Blamey was appointed Commander-in-Chief, should be revived to govern the affairs of the Army in general, leaving Blamey to exercise command in the field.

The fact that the proposal had been made at all was a measure of the animosity Blamey had roused in some Labour quarters. It did not take long for Kemsley, who had served under Blamey as a junior officer of Monash's headquarters staff in the first war, to realise that the peril of Blamey's overthrow was very real.

Nobody could have told Kemsley, a peacetime public relations expert, anything about Blamey's deficiencies. He had repeatedly urged Blamey to conciliate the Press and politicians, when conciliation entailed no sacrifice of principle, and to imitate certain other famous military figures and not only be Commander-in-Chief, but also to strike the godlike attitudes popularly expected of a man cast in such a *rôle*.

"I'll do as I like," Blamey growled.

Neither Kemsley nor Blamey's other advisers had been able to move him. His firmness was a symptom of his old familiar impatience with humbug. It was also a symptom of his refusal to recognise that most human beings respond to polite insincerity. As such, it was distressful to the officers about him who believed that any reduction in Blamey's authority over the Army would be a retrograde step. Now they faced the possibility that Caucus would force War Cabinet, even in the teeth of John Curtin's likely opposition, to reduce Blamey's powers.

Blamey was out of Melbourne at the time, which was probably for the best. So Kemsley took his information to a number of officers at Victoria Barracks whom he knew as "Blamey men." General Lloyd, the Adjutant-General, saw the danger at once. He discussed the emergency with other of Blamey's senior staff officers, including Northcott, Chief of the General Staff; J. H. Cannan, Quartermaster-General; and L. E. Beavis, Master-General of the Ordnance.

The outcome was that Lloyd visited Canberra on April 13 and called by appointment on Curtin. He told Curtin he was speaking for the Principal Staff Officers at L.H.Q., and for the Technical, Business, and Financial Advisers to the Commander-in-Chief. All

these men believed, he said, that it would be a tragedy if the Military Board were to be revived and the terms of Blamey's appointment varied. It was their opinion, he told Curtin, that no other officer was qualified to replace Blamey.

When Lloyd was done, Curtin put his own viewpoint—or perhaps a combination of his own viewpoint and that of the Labour elements hostile to Blamey. Curtin was plainly concerned about the small measure of publicity the Australian Army's operations were getting in the Australian Press.

"I've got a tremendous regard for Blamey," he told Lloyd, "but I'll tell you frankly we don't like his Public Relations show. We don't get nearly enough publicity for all these things we're doing in the field."

Curtin pointed to the main editorial article in that day's issue of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. It was headlined, *Australia's Anonymous War in the Islands*, and it asked "Why are the forces and their leaders engaged in these secondary but gruelling operations enshrouded in a veil of anonymity as dense as that imposed when the Japanese were threatening Australia?" The article continued in this vein for about a column, and closed: "The Army, not the Navy, is today the Silent Service, and its silence in this context appears as meaningless as it is unjust and injurious to morale."

Curtin had another complaint against Blamey. Many members on each side of the House were grumbling that the Army was reluctant to release men who could, at this stage of the war, serve their country better in civilian life than in the fighting services. Curtin did not say it, but Lloyd realised that many a Parliamentarian must have suffered irritation when his application for the release from the Army of some constituent had been bluntly rejected.

Lloyd left Curtin with the impression that the shoals were not yet passed, but that if Blamey could be persuaded to alter the ship's course a little, all would be well. He seized the first chance that offered to open the subject with Blamey. Blamey listened with, for him, surprising patience. He had always placed much reliance on the judgment of the brilliant and urbane Lloyd, and he agreed, with no more than token resistance, that the time had come when the Army should adopt a more liberal policy on the release of men to civilian life.

"Now this Public Relations thing," said Lloyd. "You ought to sack Rasmussen."

Brigadier J. H. Rasmussen, a peacetime newspaper man, and later managing editor of the Melbourne *Argus*, was Blamey's Director-General of Public Relations. He was considered by many critics of

the Army's publicity methods, including Curtin, to be the chief architect of the rigid policy which ensured that newspaper reports of field operations were colourless and dull.

"No," Blamey said.

Lloyd told Blamey that it might cost him his own appointment if he were to insist on saving Rasmussen's neck.

"No," Blamey repeated. "Rasmussen served me with great loyalty in the early New Guinea days, and I won't let him be harmed. I'll have a talk with him and get him to do what you say, but I won't sack him."

Lloyd knew it would be useless to pursue the subject. He could only hope that what he had been able to do would satisfy Curtin—or, anyway, would enable Curtin to satisfy those of his followers who would gladly have seen Blamey's head fall. In fact, it did, though the political antipathy for Blamey was not dispelled, but only soothed. So Blamey went on to finish the Second World War as Australia's Commander-in-Chief. The story might have had a different ending had Curtin, who died in office less than three months later, not been there to stand between Blamey and the hands which sought to pull him down.

Blamey could hardly have looked for such protection from Curtin's successor, Ben Chifley. Blamey and Chifley were men with little in common but a fondness for pipe-smoking and a monolithic strength of character.

17

TWILIGHT OF A SOLDIER

1

LATE in November, 1945, Blamey wrote a letter to Lord Birdwood, leader of the Anzacs in the first war, in England. After telling the eighty-year-old field-marshal of his impending retirement from the Army, Blamey's letter continued: "We did not end the war with quite so clear-cut a termination as we were able to last war, owing to many difficult and unhappy heritages that have been thrown up. But one cannot expect the waves to settle down immediately the storm is over. It is unavoidable that there will be some turmoil."

Blamey himself was experiencing some of the turmoil, though he did not mention the fact to Birdwood. He had been told with somewhat startling suddenness by a letter from Forde, Minister of the Army, on November 14 that the Government had decided to end his appointment as Commander-in-Chief.

As long before as September 15 Blamey had sent Forde an official memorandum, saying he was "desirous of laying down my office as early as possible." The memorandum observed: "My task is now complete, and there is no further occasion for the exercise or continuance of my powers of Commander-in-Chief. The residual task involves no military operations in the face of resistance, and is purely administrative in character." But the Government were not ready then to let Blamey go. They wished him to supervise the task of demobilisation, so he did not press his proposal that he should retire. He would have been glad to take his ease for a while, but instead he threw himself into the work of turning soldiers back into civilians.

True, he was a trifle surprised when the Government decided he could not be spared, even for a week or so, to take the guest of honour's chair at the American Legion's first postwar annual convention, held in Chicago in November. He betrayed a measure of excitement, which was unusual for him, when the Legion's invitation reached him. No Australian had ever before been honoured in this way.

"This is a really great thing, Berry," he told General Berryman. "The Government will jump at this. When Dr. Evatt, with his international sense, gets to hear of this he'll be beside himself with joy." [Dr. Herbert Vere Evatt, Attorney-General and Minister of External Affairs, 1941-49, is generally conceded to have done more than any other man to give Australia an effective voice in international affairs.]

But Blamey did not go to Chicago, after all. He asked the Government for formal permission to accept the invitation. On November 3 he had his reply in the form of a telegram from Forde. It told him that "at the present time the complexity of the problems confronting the Army renders it undesirable that you should leave the Australian Army area. With great regret therefore we request that you should decline the present invitation." Naturally Blamey accepted the ruling, though he did not pretend to understand the reasons of it. He understood them still less when Forde's letter breaking the news that he was to be retired reached him eleven days later.

The letter told Blamey that General Sturdee had been chosen to become Acting Commander-in-Chief from December 1, and would serve in that capacity until the Military Board could be reorganised.

Blamey replied: "It is a great convenience personally to me to be freed to my private affairs at the earliest possible date, and for this I thank you. But I am naturally somewhat disturbed at what appears to be a sudden and unseemly haste to meet my personal convenience.

"You will recall that, over a period of some months, I have endeavoured to secure decisions on postwar policy which would have allowed easy transition from the present system to one suited to peacetime conditions. I have informed you personally on various occasions that, while I have been anxious to return to civil life, I have held my services at the disposal of the nation."

The nation, or at least the Government of the day, obviously no longer required Blamey's services. After more than six years as Australia's top military commander, he had sixteen days to pack up his effects and make his farewells.

The Government showed little interest, or perhaps little faith, in his recommendations for the organisation of a postwar army. He had urged that control should be exercised, not by the Military Board, but by an Army Council composed of the Minister as chairman, the G.O.C.s of Eastern and Southern Commands, the Chief of the General Staff, a militia representative, the Secretary of the Army Department, and the Chief Finance Officer. The Government decided to revive the Military Board. He had also urged that, as a principle, the post of

G.O.C. of either Eastern or Southern Command should be held by a Citizen Force officer. "In both world wars," he wrote, "the bulk of the army field commands has been filled by citizen force officers, and it is considered, for many years to come, citizen force officers capable of holding such commands will be available." The Government did not adopt the proposal. Finally, he had recommended General Berryman to be Chief of the General Staff. The Government chose Sturdee as C.G.S., and Rowell as Vice-C.G.S., with the obvious intention, subsequently carried into effect, of appointing Rowell to the senior post when Sturdee reached the statutory retiring age in 1950.

Blamey knew, in the last days of November, that he was wasting his time in putting forward any ideas on military questions. One of his deepest regrets was that he had perhaps injured Berryman's career by having praised him.

"You'll have to watch your p's and q's now, Berry," he said. "The Government won't have a bar of anything I have proposed."

A few days after his retirement he and Berryman were at a party together. A Press photographer was about to take a picture, and Berryman was standing at Blamey's elbow.

"You get out of the photograph, Berry," Blamey said, pushing him away. "If you're in it, it will finish you."

Blamey's last day in office as Commander-in-Chief was an expression, in miniature, of the turbulence of his whole life. In his farewell talk with Forde, he asked if the Government intended to adopt a series of recommendations he had made for the award of honours to a number of senior officers. He had drawn the attention of the Government, in a letter to Forde on September 8, 1945, to the "very meagre recognition and reward" that had been given to senior officers "who have borne the weight of war in the field for six years." His letter continued:

"The traditional award in the British Empire to successful action in the field is appointment to one of the existing orders of chivalry in the appropriate grade. This has been recognised by the Australian Government in a few cases.

"There is, however, a genuine ground for the feeling that Australian commanders are treated far less generously than those of other parts of the Empire. Also, that greater generosity was displayed when Australian forces served under British command in the Middle East than under Australian command in the S.W.P. area.

"The contrast between the basis of awards of this war and last war is also very strong. For example, in 1918 all Australian divisional commanders were elevated to the rank of Knight Commander of the

Order of the Bath, although their service in those appointments was in every case less than six months.*

"I have raised the matter from time to time, and have made certain recommendations; but so far have received no reply."

In this letter Blamey recommended the award of knighthoods to Generals Sturdee, Savige, Stevens, Berryman, and Wootten, and of lesser honours to Generals Ramsay and Milford.

In a later submission, dated October 10, he recommended awards for nine officers whose Pacific services had been largely non-operational—knighthoods for Generals Northcott, Cannan, and Burston; and lesser honours for Generals Smart, C. E. M. Lloyd, Beavis, Steele, Chapman, and J. J. Murray. [A notable absentee from this list, Major-General C. H. Simpson, Signal Officer-in-Chief of Allied Land Headquarters, was recommended for an honour in a separate citation. The recommendation was of no avail.]

Now Blamey pressed Forde for an answer. Did the Government intend to recognise the war services of these men in the form he had suggested, or did it propose to ignore his recommendations?

Forde replied that it was not the Labour Government's policy to award decorations for non-operational service, or knighthoods at all. Blamey's mouth grew taut as Forde explained that the Government was not actuated by ingratitude to the officers concerned: it was bound by principles of Labour policy. . . . But, now, about General Blamey himself? What would he like the Government to do to register appreciation of his services?

"I don't want anything." Blamey said. "All I want to do after I leave the barracks is attack your Government. I'll do it at every opportunity."

And so he marched out to spend his last night as Commander-in-Chief dining as the guest of sixty-eight of his senior officers who had stood with him at sunset to watch his blue silk ensign ceremonially hauled down for the last time.

Blamey's declaration that he wanted nothing for himself was not literally true. He wanted a Buick staff car, in which he had travelled some 50,000 miles in Middle East and Australian war areas. He

* It is hard to escape the conclusion that Blamey, whose memory was phenomenal by any standard, did not, in a desire to strengthen the force of the case he presented, deliberately err when he framed this sentence. Major-Generals William Glasgow (1st Division), Charles Rosenthal (2nd Division), and John Gellibrand (3rd Division) were honoured with knighthoods, though each had commanded his division only from May, 1918. But Major-General (later Lieutenant-General) Talbot Hobbs, though he was knighted on January 1, 1918, led the 5th Division from December, 1916, until after the end of hostilities. Major-General Ewen Sinclair-MacLagan, a British regular officer, commanded the 4th Division from July 16, 1917, until it went home, but inexplicably missed the honour of knighthood.

offered to buy the car. After some weeks he was told the Government had decided to present it to him. Blamey insisted he would prefer to buy it, and it was only after long persuasion that he agreed to accept the Buick as a gift.

The Buick's market value, at that time of inflated prices for used cars, was about £400, which meant that the cash worth of the gift was something less than 3s. 5¾d. a day for the 2,303 days of Blamey's second war service.

2

The measure of Blamey's personal contribution to the defeat of the enemy is never likely to be assessed in terms which will not be disputed by his friends, on the one hand, or his foes, on the other. However, even his most relentless detractors acknowledge that the part he played was substantial: his most ardent admirers insist, with some justification, that it exceeded the individual contribution of any other Australian.

To attempt an estimate, it is necessary to consider Blamey's achievements in two distinct phases of the war. The first is his command from 1940 to 1942 of the A.I.F. in the Middle East. The second is his command from 1942 to 1945 of the Australian Military Forces and (however nominally in the later stages of the conflict) of Allied Land Forces, in the South-West Pacific Area. The *rôles* that Blamey played in these two phases were, except for their military character, essentially different, but they had one factor in common: Blamey was a subordinate, first to Wavell or Auchinleck, then to MacArthur. In the large sense, the limitations of Wavell, Auchinleck and MacArthur, in turn, determined Blamey's limitations at the relevant stages of the war—as Blamey's own limitations determined the limitations of Herring, Berryman, Morshead and the other of his senior subordinates. This is the way of war, the way it has to be. It would be idle to claim that Blamey was the military peer or master of Wavell or Auchinleck or MacArthur. Given equal power in like circumstances, he might have outgeneralled any, or all, of them; or he might have failed under the weight of the greater test. Since he was never required, or offered the chance, to try military strides with any of them, speculation on the possibilities of any such hypothetical matching of qualities is profitless.

The popular conception dies hard that a General Officer, even one bearing a commander-in-chief's responsibilities, spends most of his waking hours in time of war personally directing his soldiers, if not personally leading them into battle. This popular misbelief was a source of persistent irritation to Blamey, throughout the Pacific war

in particular. It certainly played some part in precipitating, though it was not the root cause of, the crisis in Papua which resolved itself into Blamey's final break with Rowell. This episode was, for Blamey, the most troublous fruit of a widespread idea that the commander-in-chief should be present in the battle-line; but it was by no means the only time that he suffered the consequences of public inability to believe that a general might be more profitably employed than in firing a rifle from a fox-hole.

Let us glance at Blamey's record in the two distinct phases of his second war service:

In the Middle East he commanded fighting operations in only one campaign—Greece. British arms suffered a cruel defeat in Greece, but it would be a daring man who would assert that the work of Anzac Corps in these operations was not a military *tour de force*. It deserves to be remembered that Blamey was among those who predicted that defeat was inevitable before the first shot was fired: the British triumph lay in the comparative mildness of the defeat, in the success of the fighting retreat. Apart from the campaign in Greece, Blamey was given no opportunity to command in the field in the Middle East. He was promoted to the empty post of Deputy Commander-in-Chief immediately he set foot in Egypt after his recall from Greece; and he remained the incumbent of this artificial post until the Australian War Cabinet, in March, 1942, summoned him to serve in the Pacific.

Of necessity, Blamey's actions at this period of his Middle East service expressed the character, not of the fighting commander, but of the shrewd military administrator, always alert to protect and enlarge the A.I.F.'s prestige. His most valuable work, as Deputy Commander-in-Chief, was done as the Australian Government's watchdog. It was exemplified in such actions as his battle with Auchinleck for the relief of the Australian garrison in Tobruk, and his insistence that the A.I.F. must be grouped, and trained for use, as a national force. Blamey's antagonism to every proposal that the A.I.F. should be broken into small parts and used piecemeal was not merely a projection of his spirit of nationalism. He never retreated from a conviction that war could be successfully waged only in accordance with a set of tried and proved principles. He was fluid enough in his thinking to admit that *force majeure*, as in Wavell's day, sometimes imposed upon a commander the need to depart from fixed principles, to improvise, to snatch at any straw that might offer in a crisis. But he was an unfaltering champion of the observance of military principles. He based his own decisions on such principles, and demanded that his subordinates should follow a like pattern of

action. How much influence Blamey's example exerted upon the development of British military thinking in the Middle East is difficult to estimate; but there is no doubt that his active proselytisation was a considerable force in curbing a dangerous fondness in some influential quarters for "Jock columns" and other whimsical formations of a like nature. He did not wield the authority required to prevent the British from using their own forces in what he held to be a wasteful and ineffective fashion; but he did wield authority over the A.I.F., and he did not hesitate to use it.

By the time Blamey was recalled to Australia, after the outbreak of the Pacific war, he was thoroughly experienced, not only in the doctrines of modern warfare, but also in the wiles a senior commander who is yet a subordinate must employ if he is to maintain his own integrity and protect the interests of his officers and men, without losing his military head. In MacArthur, Blamey found himself under the orders of a talented and seasoned soldier whose methods and personality were as different from those of Wavell and Auchinleck as Wavell's and Auchinleck's were from one another's. But in the Pacific there was another factor: MacArthur had been sent to Australia on a direct plea of the Australian Prime Minister to the U.S. President. When Blamey saw fit to buck MacArthur (and he did so many times), he was, in a measure, bucking also the Australian Government, which had virtually given MacArthur a charter to conduct the South-West Pacific campaign as might seem best to him. It was probably the greatest achievement of Blamey's career that he should have contrived to steer a course through the multitudinous shoals without wrecking himself or diminishing the solidarity of American-Australian wartime partnership.

However, as in the Middle East, Blamey had little chance in the Pacific to prove his qualities as a fighting commander. Nobody has yet come forward to find fault with his tactical direction of the campaign which drove the Japanese back along the Kokoda Trail, the only period of the Pacific war in which he exercised field command; but apart from this operation, his Pacific reputation rests largely upon his achievements in administering a vast, and complex, command. Other Australian commanders might have equalled Blamey's performance in the field; it is impossible to discern another who could have equalled him in applying the principles of organisation and command at high level. None of his decisions concerning operations in the field, except those touching the islands campaign, has been seriously questioned, even by armchair Wellingtons pondering past events in the revealing light of retrospect. And if the islands campaign is a blot on Blamey's military record-sheet, it is a blot also on the

political record-sheet of the Australian Government of the day; for the motive of the islands campaign was largely political, a device to keep Australia actively in the war.

Different men saw Blamey with different eyes, but they all agree on one point: Blamey left nobody in any doubt who commanded the Australian Army. He had the will to dominate, and he dominated in all matters concerned with the Army. He inspired confidence in everyone who knew his military ability, but he had no intimates, and few of those about him loved him. There must have been many officers and men in the Army, as well as many Australians outside it, who did not share the confidence of the hierarchy that knew his great capacities. He visited the troops often, and he genuinely had their interests at heart, but he inspired little confidence in them; he simply lacked the golden touch in human relationships that is sometimes found even in lesser men. If Blamey cared about the ordinary soldier's indifference to him, he showed no sign of it. In any event, he went on working untiringly in the troops' interests; one of his highest military talents was his ability to assess the morale of his soldiers and to take measures to keep it at a high level.

He had all the military attributes of a great commander, but he was not called upon to exercise them. He had a sound knowledge of the mechanics of war, and ability to grasp the essentials of a military problem, make quick decisions, and issue clear orders. He was direct with his subordinate commanders and staff, but it is fair to say that few trusted him personally or knew what he was thinking behind his poker face. In picking subordinates, he made some good selections and some incredibly bad ones. Even many of his dispassionate admirers considered that the Army contained some doubtful senior officers who held their positions by only one virtue—Blamey's personal liking for them. This was one of his shortcomings that impelled some of his most loyal officers to deny him their complete trust. In the final analysis, such blemishes were insignificant. Blamey was not only Australia's chosen top commander, but also overwhelmingly the best soldier Australia could have found for the post.

3

Blamey's Army service officially ended on January 31, 1946. He spent the last two months of it in writing his dispatches on the closing phases of the war. Then he was free to devote himself to his own affairs.

He was plagued by none of the financial worries that had beset him before the war. Some of his pre-war investments had prospered. And friends, who were more numerous when Blamey was Australia's Commander-in-Chief than when he was ex-Chief Commissioner of the

Victorian Police Force, had put other profitable investments in his way. One block of shares he bought early in the war for £1,000 had increased in value eightfold by the time of his death. It was largely through such pieces of good luck that he was able to leave an estate valued at £36,000.

However, he still lived in a modest flat in South Yarra, which he rented for £6 a week. He hoped to build a home on a block of land he owned nearby when the building problems caused by postwar confusion had eased. Meanwhile, he took a small office at the east end of Collins-street and there he handled business matters and did his writing.

He had been offered a handsome price for his second war memoirs, and he planned to write two books, *Middle East Background* and *Pacific Background*. He wrote rough drafts of a number of chapters for these works, but the books were never finished. "Too many reputations would have to be hurt," Blamey told a friend. It was the only explanation he ever gave of his failure to complete the task.

But he did much journalistic writing. The insistent theme of his newspaper articles was Australia's need to keep its national defences in order. He felt that Australia was going the way of every democracy after a great war; it was settling back to business as usual, with no thought of tomorrow. In an article in the Melbourne *Herald* on June 4, 1947, he wrote:

"No system of military defence can be considered adequate under modern conditions which does not lay the foundations for the preparation, not only of the armed forces, but of the whole nation.

"In such a scheme every class of the community must be considered, and the part which they must play—first, in the armed forces which will take the first shock of war; second, in the organisation of the nation to supply those armed forces; and, third, in the organisation of the whole community to ensure the maintenance and welfare of the country.

"It is not essential at this stage that a huge proportion of the national income should be diverted to this purpose. But it is essential, if we are to be realistic at all in the matter, that the foundations should be laid and the essential framework of the machinery be provided.

"Unless this conception is accepted and applied, the money expended will be largely wasted, and the nation will be no more prepared to meet the position than it was in 1939."

This is typical of the views Blamey expressed after the war. He had experienced the shock of total war, and he saw any future war as a conflict for which industry, the armed forces, every citizen must be made ready in advance.

He had left the Commander-in-Chief's office only a few months when he came into collision with the Government. A proposal that Manus Island, north-west of New Guinea, and the largest of the Admiralty Islands, should be handed over to the U.S. as the site of a permanent base was being urged at the beginning of 1946. Blamey insisted that Australia must keep control of Manus. A brief study of history, he said, showed how within fifty years friendships between nations could change. Possession of a strategic base close to Australia by a powerful America might some day be a reason for unfriendliness. Manus would be suitable only for a base to stop an attack from Australia or an attack on Australia. Geographically, it stood, said Blamey, as "a dagger threatening New Guinea and Australia."

Chifley, then Australia's Prime Minister, visited London about this time, and was questioned on Blamey's views at a Press conference.

"We don't need stooges to speak for us," Chifley said. "General Blamey is not the spokesman of the Australian Government."

"My reply to Mr. Chifley," Blamey retorted, in a Press statement, "is that I was speaking for a large body of Australian soldiers, many of whom lost their lives in trying to retain Australian rights."

He was not disturbed by such clashes. On the contrary, he seemed to revel in them. He was no less ready than he had ever been to plunge into a fight in defence of his opinions.

And he could still meet an awkward situation without batting an eye. Some brows were raised in 1947 when the composition of Australia's Battle Honours Committee was announced. As well as other of Australia's senior wartime commanders, it included Blamey, Bennett, and Rowell. The meeting passed off with no untoward incident. The presence of tension was evident only in the atmosphere of extreme restraint on all sides.

4

For all his wartime exertions, Blamey was physically fitter than all but one in a thousand men of his years. Burston, his Director-General of Medical Services, had subjected him to a rigorous medical examination at the end of the war. His blood pressure then would have done credit to a man in the thirties, his strong heart was unimpaired, there was no sign of degenerative processes. Blamey's temperament would not have let him coddle himself; but, anyway, there was no medical reason for him to do so.

He worked with all his might at anything his hand found to do, whether it was as strategic controversialist, chairman of Victoria's State Savings Bank commissioners, member of the exclusive Victoria

Racing Club Committee, or president of the Navy, Army, and Air Force Club. His energy seemed to be boundless.

Much of his time, in these closing years of his life, was given to the promotion of causes touching the welfare of ex-service people. Whenever he accepted such an unpaid post, he would never consent to be a figurehead, taking the glory and leaving the bullocking to be done by someone else.

He was first a member, then chairman, of the Victorian Blinded Soldiers' Welfare Trust. When an effort to raise funds for a War Nurses' Memorial Centre was flagging, Blamey took over the leadership and transformed the operation from failure to brilliant success. He had always cherished a profound, an almost awed, admiration for the work of Army nursing sisters. He once told Colonel A. M. Sage, Matron-in-Chief in the later war years of the Australian Army Nursing Service:

"I can speak on any occasion, in any conditions; but there are two occasions on which I become emotional. One is when I speak to the troops when they come out of battle. The other is when I speak to the nursing sisters."

The years had not dulled his appetite for new experience. When General Douglas MacArthur, Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers in Japan, asked him to visit Tokyo in 1948, he accepted the invitation at once. He travelled as far as Iwakuni airfield, on Hiroshima Bay, by Lancaster. There he was welcomed by his old subordinate Lieut.-General Robertson, who had become Commander-in-Chief of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force—the same "Red Robbie" who, so his friends said, had been denied the military advancement his talents warranted because Blamey disliked him. It was a delicate moment for Blamey. The Australian author Frank Clune, who was travelling to Japan in the same Lancaster to gather material for his book, *The Ashes of Hiroshima,* was watching Blamey as the gangway went down. Clune had reason to know the sharper side of Blamey's character; for Blamey had expelled Clune, then a war writer, from Papua in 1943 because he "didn't like something I had written."

Blamey was tense. To Clune's eye, he seemed to expect that Robertson would greet him with only the barest minimum of formal warmth. Instead, Robertson, after saluting, gave the Old Man a friendly handshake. Blamey then inspected the R.A.A.F. Guard of Honour drawn up near the plane. As he finished his inspection, Clune saw his face. There were tears on his cheeks. Clune supposed them to be tears of thankfulness that Robertson should have buried any old bitterness he might have still cherished.

MacArthur sent his own plane *Bataan* to Iwakuni to carry Blamey to Tokyo, and was waiting at Haneda airport when the plane touched down. There was a great depth of friendship in the meeting of the two old wartime comrades.

Blamey was very weary when the visit to Japan ended. Any man might have been excused for feeling jaded after the three weeks of incessant entertainment and travel he had undergone. But in Blamey, bodily weariness was something strange. Men close to him asked themselves later if it was the drain that his visit to Japan imposed on his reserves of energy that started him along the path to death.

5

Suggestions that the King should be asked to promote Blamey to the rank of field-marshal, in recognition of his war services, had been ignored by the Chifley Government. But Labour was defeated at the general election in 1949, and in December Menzies was back in office as Prime Minister. One of Menzies' first acts was to recommend, through the Governor-General, that Blamey should be promoted a field-marshal. Menzies, though never an intimate friend of Blamey, was among his staunchest admirers; he believed that Blamey had done everything that any soldier could do to earn the baton. But the British War Office response was not enthusiastic. Menzies was told that Blamey could not be promoted because he was no longer on the Army active list.

This was where Menzies set his teeth. At the time, Blamey was taking a roaming holiday in Queensland, far from any city. Menzies had him tracked down, and spoke to him by telephone from Canberra.

"Listen, Tom," he said, "I am re-posting you to the active list from tomorrow. Don't ask me why!"

"That's all right with me, Bob," said Blamey.

His restoration to the active list removed the formal obstacle to his promotion, and he was named a field-marshal in the Birthday Honours for 1950, published in Australia on June 8. Thus he was to have the satisfaction of ending as an active soldier the life whose greatest feats had been performed in soldiering.

He had only a few days to savour the final triumph of his military career before he was stricken by the illness which was to end in his death. There was barely enough time for his military admirers to arrange a dinner in celebration of the honour. Blamey sat down with them on the night of June 14. It was a distinguished party. The nineteen hosts included seven of Blamey's wartime generals—Herring, Berryman, Beavis, C. E. M. Lloyd, A. H. Ramsay, Simpson, and Steele. It included also such old friends as Eugene Gorman, K.C., A. N.

Kemsley, and Sydney Crawcour. Blamey gave a memorable speech, in response to his Toast. Then he went right round the table, halting at each chair and making some quip about its occupant—often a reference to some episode which the subject had fondly believed to be unknown to the Old Man.

Blamey was failing even then. He had had warning that the body which had never let him down seriously was cracking at last. For about a year before he fell ill he suffered under a kidney disorder which grew steadily more acute. Characteristically, he told nobody; nor did he seek medical advice. His wife was unaware of her husband's trouble when they went off to Queensland for seven weeks in April and May of 1950. Their holiday was spent largely in cruising on the Barrier Reef, and it was then that Lady Blamey detected something amiss. Among other disturbing symptoms, Blamey was noticeably unsteady on his legs, though he refused to admit it.

It was a shock, but hardly a surprise, to Lady Blamey, when he fell gravely ill about the middle of June and had to be hurried into the Mercy Hospital, in Melbourne. He rallied next day, but almost at once pneumonia supervened. His medical advisers believed he was dying; they did not expect his life to last much more than twenty-four hours. Then drugs, and the man's incredible vitality, dispelled the pneumonic condition, and the immediate danger passed. But he was still desperately ill.

After some weeks he was moved to the Repatriation General Hospital, at Heidelberg. He was a mere shell of the man who had commanded the Australian Army, but as they put him into bed at Heidelberg, paralysed in the legs and sub-conscious, he came out of his coma long enough to flicker a glance of recognition at Matron E. F. Hanrahan, who had served with the Army Nursing Service in the war.

The prospect of prolonging his life for even a few weeks seemed slender. The task fell to Dr. Roderick Andrew, who had returned to private practice in Melbourne after serving with the A.I.F. throughout the war. There was, of course, an intangible factor also: Blamey's supreme will to live. The cause of the paralysis of his legs was, in simple terms, the formation of a blood clot in one of the arteries of the spinal cord. It was a stroke of the spinal cord, instead of the brain. Andrew called the best neurologists to Blamey's aid, but there was a strict limit upon human ability to halt the effect of the degenerative processes which had appeared.

For more than two months his life was in the balance. He was physically helpless. He appeared to be doomed, at best, to a bedridden life. Then, miraculously, his health began to improve. It was inex-

plicable; or it would have been inexplicable in a man in whom the flame of life burnt less strongly. He was as weak as an infant, his speech was slurred, but from some reservoir within himself he began to draw strength.

If Blamey had not partially recovered, he would never have held in his hands the symbol of his promotion to field-marshal's rank, the scarlet and gold baton. It would have been a bitter thing if he had not experienced the joy that the touch of the baton gave him, for it was the proudest possession of his life.

As his improvement continued, both his wife and his son exerted their powers of suggestion to persuade him that he should permit the baton to be presented to him in hospital. He demurred, because he had hoped to receive the baton from the King's hands. And another consideration weighed with him; he shrank from the thought of appearing as the central figure in a more or less public ceremony when he was a stricken, old man.

"I won't take the baton until I'm on my feet," he insisted.

Then, suddenly, he agreed. No other Australian, nor any Dominions soldier except Jan Smuts, had ever been created a field-marshal. Blamey realised that the presentation of the baton would be a historic episode for Australia. So, on September 16, 1950, Mr. (later Sir) William McKell, the Governor-General, presented the baton to Blamey in the Repatriation General Hospital, Heidelberg.

Official representatives of all the fighting services, Blamey's wartime commanders, and his personal guests assembled in the sunroom of the west wing, near the room in which Blamey lived his last months. Blamey lay in a wheel-chair. He had to be lifted from his bed, and placed in the chair. His legs were covered with a rug, but he wore a tunic bearing field-marshal's insignia. It was to be the only time he would ever wear the insignia.

He sat, aged and shrunken, against a background of flags which had been brought from his home to decorate the room. The guests had been told there must be no talking, since the strain on Blamey would have to be reduced to a minimum. His eyes, the strange pale eyes that never lost their fire, travelled from face to face. He seemed anxious to fix in his mind the details of the scene.

Time wore on, and McKell and Menzies did not appear. Their plane had reached Essendon airport at the appointed hour, but a miscalculation of the time they would take on the journey to Heidelberg caused them to arrive at the hospital about ten minutes late. All through the agonising period of waiting, Blamey sat rigidly in his chair, holding himself in an iron grip, precisely like a soldier on

parade. The tension had become nearly intolerable when McKell and Menzies at last entered the room.

Blamey had prepared a speech for the day. He had dictated the ideas he wished to express to his old friend and adviser, Eugene Gorman, and his son Tom, and they had done the work of putting the speech into shape. But when Blamey was being made ready for the ceremony he handed the typewritten pages to a nursing sister, and told her to take them away. He had always detested having to make a speech carefully assembled and edited in advance.

It was a pity that Blamey baulked on this occasion; for the prepared speech meticulously expressed his feelings for Australia, and for the Australians who had served with, or under, him in two world wars. Thus he had planned to say:

"I was for many years in a position where expression of my deep feelings for them was denied by my responsibilities.

"I want the survivors and the families of those who fell to know that I, who knew better than most what our soldiers did, have frequently been moved beyond words by what I have had to ask of them and by the manner in which they invariably responded.

"To all my good comrades, my grateful thanks. I felt more than I was ever able to say, the price that was charged them in deaths and maimings and the sorrows of those they left. It was the biggest burden I carried. I hope Australia, too, will never forget.

"There are many fields of service open to good citizens, but the Armed Services are perhaps the most spectacular.

"I had the good fortune to be chosen for that sphere where the security of one's country is the goal and where manliness and sacrifice are the qualities most demanded. The good soldier looks on his King as someone he serves personally as well as patriotically, and the ranker who gives his best serves as truly as his commander-in-chief.

"Military service is a very honourable calling, and I commend it to young Australians of high ideals. Its compensations more than outweigh more material gains.

"The baton that has come to me is a richer reward than any soldier could have hoped for. It symbolises authority and responsibility on the highest plane. I receive it in a spirit of humility, and as trustee for all the unnamed comrades whose loyalty, courage, and faithful service were responsible for its being conferred on me.

"A few words on our future. The spirit and hard work of our pioneers made it possible for us to enjoy life in our Australia, and their young, generous, and brave descendants volunteered twice in this century to serve their country in its need.

"Our nation's future is, unfortunately, not yet secured, and its

sons must consent to accept whatever responsibilities fall on them, and draw strength for their discharge from the traditions of their predecessors.

"I can no longer lead them, but I commend those familiar Army words in which was so often combined all that was best of exhortation and encouragement: 'Carry on'."

But Blamey simply could not bring himself to read the words he had had made ready: his speech must be spontaneous, or nothing. He sat with the baton in his hand, after McKell had handed it to him, and at last he began to speak. His voice, though pitifully thin, pitifully small, was yet authoritative. Everything he said was distinct, and not a word was slurred. His speech went straight to the hearts of the listeners. No man or woman who heard him on that day could have failed to be deeply moved by the courage of the old soldier who would not be beaten.

Fears that the strain of the ceremony would aggravate his illness were not realised. He was astonishingly well next day, and demanded to see all the newspapers. One of the published pictures of the ceremony displeased him. He called Matron Hanrahan and tapped the picture with an indignant forefinger.

"Goodness me," he exclaimed. "I look like a broken-down German general with a meerschaum pipe!"

Matron Hanrahan decided then that no man with so sharp a concern for his appearance in a newspaper picture was likely to release his grip on life for some time to come.

6

Blamey fought on through the months of spring and summer. Medical science could not explain the phenomenon, but gradually he grew stronger, better able to attend to his own needs.

Simple things gave him inordinate pleasure. He was delighted when the Melbourne Greek community presented him with a Greek flag. He told a nursing sister to stand it in the corner of his room. It stayed there until he died. Every day one friend or another sent flowers for his room. He had a somewhat unsoldierly passion for flowers, especially daphne. When Matron Hanrahan or a nursing sister entered his room he would almost always call her to examine the beauties of some new blossom.

His personal stocks were higher now than they had ever been with the men he had once commanded; anyway, inside Heidelberg. The medical and nursing staff were forever answering other sick veterans' questions about the progress of the battle "Old Tom" was putting up.

He knew more of the gossip of the hospital than did any other

patient or member of the staff. Patients who were able to move about would slip into his room when there was nobody to keep them at bay, for the satisfaction of being able to boast that they had "had a word with T.A.B." Most of them brought him titbits of information, which he took pleasure in retailing to members of the staff who tended him.

Contemplation of his field-marshal's baton was a source of satisfaction that never failed him. Matron Hanrahan locked the baton away in the hospital strongroom after the ceremony, but a few days later Blamey asked for it. He had it placed in a top drawer of his dressing-table, and it was there when he died. When visitors asked to see the baton he would tell them where to find it. His eyes would light as he watched the expression of awe common to those who opened the case and saw the baton for the first time. If a visitor was too diffident to ask for a sight of the baton, Blamey would find some pretext to send the caller to the drawer in which the baton-case lay. This ruse nearly always prompted some comment on the baton. Then Blamey would ask, elaborately casual, "Would you like to see it?"

At the 1950 Christmas-tide an electrician came to connect the fairy lights in the branches of the miniature Christmas tree in his room. When the electrician had done his work he said, "I'd like to see your baton, sir."

Matron Hanrahan got the baton-case and placed it in Blamey's hands. He handed it to the electrician, who opened the case and touched the baton with reverent fingertips.

"Wonderful!" the man said. ". . . My word, sir, they must have thought you deserved it!"

It was characteristic of Blamey that he never believed he would die, or even have to live as a permanent invalid. Only a few weeks before his death he personally approved the architectural plans for the house he wished to build in South Yarra. He intended to pay for it from his £3,000-a-year field-marshal's salary.

And somehow he did win a victory, however temporarily, over the weakness of his flesh. Early in 1951 he left his bed, and, with the help of Dr. Andrew and an orderly, one propping him under each arm, he stood erect and shuffled to a wheel-chair.

"This is the beginning," he said. "I shall be walking soon."

Any doctor could have told him it was a fabulous hope. Yet it was realised. For a time he had to be content with his chair. Sometimes on sunny days he sat on the balcony. Once or twice he was wheeled on longer journeys in the hospital grounds. And then he walked. To be sure it was a halting, hesitant kind of walk, with Blamey gripping someone else's hands to steady and support him. But these were the first real steps he had taken since he was stricken, and for Blamey

they were a triumph. His leg muscles and his feet were in surprisingly good condition after his long spell without physical exercise. It was at last conceivable that, with the aid of crutches, he might walk again, though, at best, he would never be anything but a semi-invalid.

The rigid pattern he had lived by since falling ill was somewhat relaxed. Lady Blamey was allowed to cook some of his favourite dishes and bring them to him. He was permitted an occasional glass of beer or wine; but mostly he preferred ginger beer!

He had never lost interest in life in his conscious moments; now his interest quickened. He was the very picture of a proud grandfather when Tom's children, Teddy, and the infant Terry, born after Blamey went to hospital, came to see him. And he avidly followed the news of the world, the trivial as well as the large. He would talk racing and racehorses with anyone who would listen.

He was still absorbed in the Army. When Lieut.-General Henry Wells came to Melbourne, as G.O.C. Southern Command, in February, 1951, he called on Blamey at Heidelberg. Wells was wearing a new type of Australian battle-dress. Blamey discussed its merits and demerits with him in the most minute detail. Wells left feeling that, in the face of all medical logic, the indomitable old man might yet recover most of his lost health.

But Blamey's life was running out. He suffered a stroke of the brain in the early hours of Sunday morning, May 27. A few hours later he was dead.

7

Three days later, between nine in the morning and two in the afternoon, twenty thousand people passed through the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance, where the dead Blamey lay in state.

Ten generals walked with the gun-carriage which bore him over the seven-mile route from the Shrine to Fawkner Crematorium. Four thousand troops formed a military escort. It was a cloudy day, with the first chill of winter in the air, and Melbourne was silent as Blamey went through the city for the last time. Three hundred thousand people lined the route. They extended from the Shrine of Remembrance nearly as far as the Fawkner Cemetery. The organisers had not dreamed that, at most, more than a third of this number would have wished to say farewell to the dead field-marshal. Nor had they expected any such profundity of silent respect.

Two of the men who watched were R. G. Menzies, whose Government had chosen Blamey to lead the A.I.F. overseas, and R. G. Casey, Blamey's old comrade-in-arms. Casey's eyes travelled over the silent crowd, and he said:

"Look, Bob, this is an astonishing thing!"

"I'd never have expected it," Menzies replied.

It was strange to see tears in the eyes and on the cheeks of some of those who watched. Blamey himself would have appreciated the irony of it. In life, he had commanded the obedience of hundreds of thousands of men and women. Only in death did he command their tears.

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