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The Great Betrayal: Britain, Australia and the Onset of the Pacific War, 1939-1942

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of the ever-growing literature and revelations about the leaders and events of the Southwest Pacific world in which he had been enmeshed in 1941-1945. He apologizes in his preface for occasionally using the term "Jap," but in a sad way that usage typifies much of his knowledge and interpretations that need updating.

Dunn's book cannot be considered a contribution of great relevance to the national security community of today, but *Pacific Microphone* provides fascinating, on-the-spot observations by a veteran correspondent widely esteemed by his peers. And the reader of this book is likely to agree with Dunn's bottom-line conclusion: it was "an unhappy era" and a "cruel and bitter war."

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Day, David. *The Great Betrayal: Britain, Australia and the Onset of the Pacific War, 1939-1942*. New York: Norton, 1989. 388pp. \$19.95

In this thoroughly researched study of Britain, the Dominion, and the onset of the Pacific war 1939-42, Australian scholar David Day examines the period in which his country's colonial mentality and Britain's misleading assurances led to the "Battle for Australia," when that country lay almost unprotected before the conquering Japanese.

Day, author of the earlier *Menzies and Churchill at War*, bolsters his research at Churchill and Clare

Colleges with published and unpublished official documents, private papers, memoirs, contemporary letters, and secondary works. But this is a work of revisionist Australian war history that makes little allowance for the mindset of Prime Minister Robert Menzies' generation of Australian leaders. Day depicts the prejudice in London against Australian origins, accents, and manners. The various causes of bitterness between London and Canberra are carefully researched, but the nobler side of the wartime prime minister, whose broadcasts revived the failing courage of millions of Europeans, gets short shrift. There is little indication of the indomitable courage and the prophetic insights of Churchill as he stood against Hitler. A few maps of the shifting European and North African fronts during the period encompassed would have helped the reader to better understand the balance between the war theaters.

Fourteen chapters trace the progression from Australia's insouciant attitude to its realization, before the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway relieved the pressure, of its dire vulnerability. The 1930s, a time when the concept of the "mother" country led naturally to the expectation of protection, gave way to the Australian discovery that, for Britons, imperial interests and the protection of India—the "jewel in the crown"—were to take precedence over the protection of Australia. Britain was not only unprepared for war but misjudged the coming

struggle, grossly underestimating the Japanese capabilities. Britain placed excessive reliance on the French and Dutch presence in the Pacific and failed to assess Singapore's suitability as a major base, believing it would never be tested.

Australia, too, was unprepared for war; during the Depression that country's government had not wanted to burden the taxpayers and, at the outbreak of war, it disregarded arguments for a strong air force. It barred U.S. products from Australia and rejected U.S. proposals for a direct air link. When its government declared war in 1939, Australia had no aircraft fit for combat, its army and part-time militia lacked arms and though the Royal Australian Navy had six cruisers, it had little else. Even much of the high command were not Australian. Both the navy and the air force were headed by British officers.

Day portrays the years through which Churchill, dominating his cabinet and service chiefs, focused on the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the U.S.S.R. to the neglect of the Far East. He turned a deaf ear to Australia's pleas for aircraft. Churchill, who commented at the time of Pearl Harbor, "greater good fortune has rarely happened to the British Empire," did not intend U.S. attention to be diverted from Europe. The "Germany first" strategy meant that inevitable losses to the Japanese would have to be recouped later. Churchill exploited Australia's loyalty, causing General MacArthur to condemn Britain's

failure to provide for Australia's security and to return in kind Australia's generous assistance.

Menzies' shaky political position underlay the argument for the relief of Tobruk in North Africa, which damaged the prestige of the Australian troops. Visiting London, Menzies, drawn into political intrigues against Churchill, achieved little for Australian national interests. Later on, Dr. H.V. Evatt was no more successful. S.M. Bruce, the High Commissioner in London (the Commonwealth equivalent of an ambassador), and Sir Earle Page, Australian Envoy to London, were children of their time. Like Richard Casey, Australian representative in Washington and London, they did not appreciate the wide divergence of Imperial and Australian interests. Ultimately, Churchill's estimation that the Japanese would not invade Australia proved correct. Distance saved the Dominion as earlier it had muted her clamor to be heard. But before the Japanese Navy was decisively defeated at Midway, Australia suffered the traumatic fall of Singapore, with the incarceration of her troops, and the shattering bombing raid on isolated Darwin on 19 February 1942. Many, in government and out, feared Australia would be overrun.

This book presents the American reader with a little-known aspect of the Pacific war. In demonstrating the dangers of trusting implicitly the pledges of a distant ally, neglecting strategic and logistic intelligence, and underestimating the strengths of

a potential enemy, *The Great Betrayal* offers the national security community valuable lessons.

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Ball, Desmond; Langtry, J.O.; and Stevenson, J.D. *Defend the North: The Case for the Alice Springs—Darwin Railway*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985. 104pp. \$9.95

In 1942 the United States perceived a threat from the northwest. The Japanese had landed in Kiska and Attu, and it appeared that they would soon reach Seattle. The outposts in Alaska seemed to be in danger and an overland route to the north, safe from submarines, was needed. Construction of the Alcan Highway was the solution, giving the allies the capability to move men and materials north to meet the threat without having to divert naval forces from other critical theaters of operations.

Australia also faced a problem in 1942 in that country's northwest. The port of Darwin had been almost obliterated by Admiral Nagumo's carrier-based aviators. Just about everything needed to defend that part of the country had to be sent by ship. If the Canadian and American overland route north to Alaska was rugged, the Australian route north from the center of the continent at Alice Springs to the "Top End" also tested man's ability to suffer, his ingenuity, and his drive. A road, really only a track, was put in. It

wasn't much, but it was better than nothing.

The situation has changed greatly in the "Top End." Today there are several adequate roads to the Northern Territory from east, south and west. The days of the coastal steamer are now the business of museums. Vast "road trains" (tractors with three to four trailers) rapidly bring fresh vegetables and merchandise north. While this works well for the civilian population, it is inadequate for emergency military needs.

The authors are fully engrossed in their study of military issues in Australia. Among other topics, Desmond Ball has previously written on intelligence (with the American, Jeffrey Richelson), examining the U.S. Signals Intelligence facilities down under. The key authors of this book, Langtry and Stevenson, are retired officers and have experience in the area of logistics. *Defend the North* is about logistics.

The book begins with the political issue of a rail link north. Major public investments for this project, however, are restricted by the still small population. The authors argue that the railroad needs to ride the defense issue if it is ever to be built.

No doubt there have been threats from the north, real and imagined. The Australian military is increasing its presence there; the Royal Australian Air Force is establishing a new base at Katherine. Our B-52s are seen from time to time at Darwin, and even our ships have been to its enormous harbor. Still, a rail link, if you accept the authors' premises, is