

Teachers Notes

ROAD TO TOKYO

The last bloody year of World War Two in the Pacific



SYNOPSIS

By late 1944, the worst of World War Two appears to be over. Germany is awaiting defeat after D-Day and Japan has been repulsed from Australia's doorstep. But the conflict in the Pacific is about to hot up and it will be a long road to Tokyo for the Allies...

This is the forgotten story of being so near to victory, yet so far; of the terrible human sacrifice in the war's last months, which only ended with atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Narrated by Jack Thompson, *Road to Tokyo* is an Australian eyewitness account of history, told by men who faced kamikaze attacks from an enemy that refused to surrender, and by those on the homefront who waited in agony for news of 22,000 prisoners of war.

Combining interviews and vivid archival footage, it provides a social context as well as a military overview of the titanic struggle against Japan. It reveals the emotional and the physical toll on Australia's leaders, servicemen and women, and civilians.

Importantly, the film also assesses our new relationship with the United States—a strategic alliance that continues to have significance today.

And it highlights the often overlooked contribution made by Australia as General Douglas MacArthur sidelined our forces and island-hopped his way towards his goal.

Tokyo was the prize. For Australia, the road there was signposted with some of the bloodiest campaigns and most appalling events of World War Two—and the memory of 8031 POWs who would never come home.

CURRICULUM LINKS

This program will have interest and relevance for teachers and students at middle to senior secondary and tertiary levels. Curriculum links include Modern History, SOSE/HSIE, English and Media Studies.

AFTER VIEWING

What do you recall from viewing the program?

- Describe the naval events that occurred on 21 October 1944 at Leyte Gulf.
- What happened in the New South Wales town of Cowra in August 1944?
- How many Australian soldiers were held as prisoners of war by the Japanese?
- What was the importance to Australians on the homefront of the sinking of the *Rakuyo Maru* transport ship?
- Describe the general daily living conditions Australians experienced on the homefront during 1944–45.

- How did Australian women deal with the shortage of stockings during the war?
- Why was there a labour shortage in Australia, and what did the government do to solve the problem?
- Name both Australia's prime minister of the time, and Australia's military leader.
- Who was the supreme commander of Allied troops in the south-west Pacific during 1944–45, and what was his specific military aim?
- What was the general role assigned to Australian troops from 1944 onwards, and why?
- What aircraft and weapons were used by the Americans during their first attack on Tokyo in 1945? How many civilians died during the attack? What was the reaction of the Japanese government and military high command?
- Name the date of Germany's defeat in Europe. Explain what effect it had on the war in the Pacific.
- What was the importance of the island of Okinawa both to the Japanese and to the Americans in 1945? How many died during the military campaign for control of the island?
- Meanwhile, where were Australian troops deployed, and why? Why was Australian military action at this time referred to as a “sideshow”? What were the “death marches” from Sandakan to Ranau?
- As the war grew to a close, the Australian prime minister was replaced. Why? Who was the new prime minister?
- What is the significance of Balikpapan?
- According to the program, what were the reasons given for the dropping of atomic bombs by American aircraft on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945?

• In the long term, what are the reasons given for Australian representatives being present at the signing of the Japanese surrender at Tokyo Bay?

• There were two distinct crowd reactions in Sydney in September 1945, when the first of the Australian prisoners of war arrived home. How did they react, and why? At the end of the program, Joan Fisher voices a statement that links those times of 1945 to the present day. What is that statement?

GENERAL CONTEXT AND TIMELINE

Although the events shown in the program took place in 1944–45, the war against Japan by the Allies in the Pacific had begun when Japanese aircraft suddenly attacked America's military base at Pearl Harbor, in the Hawaiian Islands, on 7 December 1941. The United States immediately declared war on Japan. On the following day, Australia, which had already been at war against the Axis powers in Europe since September 1939, also declared war on Japan.

- Research the significant events of the Pacific war, 1941–45, and construct a timeline of them. This may be done as a group activity using large sheets of paper joined together and placed across a classroom wall, or as one or more web pages for the school intranet. Include the attack by the Japanese on Darwin in February 1942, the fall of the British stronghold of Singapore, the sinking of the *Rakuyo Maru*, the construction of the Thai-Burma railway, the Battle of Midway, the introduction of rationing in Australia, and the events depicted in the program both in the theatre of war and on the homefront. Ensure the end of hostilities in Europe is also sign-posted, as it will demonstrate how long the war in the Pacific continued after that date, and the destruction wrought.

WAR IN THE PACIFIC 1944–45

The events and archival film presented in the program concern the years 1944–45—the gradual advance of the Allies, pushing the Japanese back towards their homeland. However, as the program indicates, stubborn resistance was encountered, especially in Borneo.

- Research the war in the Pacific during these years in order to draw maps of the region showing the position of the Australian and American forces in relation to those of the Japanese, at various stages in 1944 and 1945. By comparing them, you should be able to observe the advances and retreats of the combatants over roughly a 12-month period.
- Working in groups, construct an illustrated chart, or set of charts, of the Allied and Japanese naval craft (including submarines) and aircraft that were used in the theatre of war at this time. (You may wish to concentrate on a particular action, such as the kamikaze attacks on Australian ships, or the sinking of the *Rakuyo Maru* and the *Kachidoki Maru*.)
- Research both the Australian and Japanese viewpoints felt and experienced at the time, of the kamikaze attacks that took place towards the end of 1944. From what you may find, write two first-person eyewitness accounts of one of these events; one should be the viewpoint of an Australian sailor on board ship, the other the viewpoint of a Japanese fighter pilot circling above.
- As we see in the program, Mick “Lofty” Hodges was one of a number of Australian soldiers belonging to the army’s Z Special Unit who parachuted into eastern Borneo to rescue soldiers held by the Japanese in a prison camp in Sandakan. Research and write a report assignment on the history of this unit during World War Two. You may illustrate it with photographs, diagrams, maps and drawings as required.

- Present any aspect of the Z Special Unit’s parachuting into Borneo as a fiction short story or a recorded radio play—this may include the original intelligence reports about the Sandakan prison camp, the planning, training and preparation required, the event itself and the aftermath. (For a radio play, work in groups to research, script, act and record the story.)

- Working in groups, research American General MacArthur and Australian General Blamey and discuss the contentious roles of these two military leaders. Then either build a website or construct large wall posters depicting their biographies, include arguments as to whether or not MacArthur and Blamey were successful in their military judgements and actions.

- You are a soldier or a member of the medical corps—either Australian or Japanese—during Operation Oboe. This controversial operation, where Generals MacArthur and Blamey were in disagreement, was the final Australian campaign of the war, involving three Borneo landings that began in May 1945, resulting in high casualties. Write a letter home to a loved one about your experiences, showing them your feelings, as well as your thoughts and opinions about what you have witnessed.

- Prepare an illustrated research assignment describing and explaining the Japanese surrender of 15 August 1945; how and where it was carried out, the personnel involved, and the terms and pledges of the surrender. Define the long-term ramifications for the Japanese nation, and whether these are still being felt today.

- Write diary entries of both Australian and Japanese military personnel (including medical and nursing staff) in the theatre of war, about the day of surrender. (An alternative to this may be to work in groups to prepare and enact mock interviews, as though news-reel camera crews were on the spot to film the events of the day.)

PRISONERS OF WAR

During World War Two, 22,000 Australian soldiers were taken as prisoners of war by the Japanese, to be used as forced labour, for example, on the construction of a railway line through the jungles of Burma and Thailand. They were brutally treated, and many died of injury, disease, exhaustion, starvation or military execution. Meanwhile, Japanese soldiers who were captured were brought to Australia and placed in POW camps such as that at Cowra, in New South Wales.

- Research and prepare an informative-style essay on the international conventions relating to the treatment of prisoners of war (POWs). Which countries conformed to these conventions during World War Two? Have the conventions altered since then? Is the term “war crime” relevant to the treatment of POWs? Explain your answers.

- In addition to the above exercise, research and prepare information on the Japanese tradition, revived under Emperor Hirohito, of the concepts of military honour, obedience to higher command, and attitudes to victory and defeat, to surrender, and to being taken as prisoner of war. Apply these concepts to the Japanese treatment of Allied POWs, and to the events of the Cowra breakout of August 1944.

- Write a short story based on the events of 12 September 1944, when two Japanese freighters, the *Rakuyo Maru* and *Kachidoki Maru*, both carrying Australian and British POWs to labour camps, were torpedoed and sunk by American “Wolfpack” submarines. You may write the story in any way you wish, from any viewpoint. (An alternative may be to write and present it as a “reality-style” documentary radio play which may be recorded.)

- Research the biographies of returned Australian prisoners of war, such as Rowley Richards who is featured in the program, and write your own diary entries about one day in the life of a POW. Note that prisoners went to great lengths to hide or preserve their diaries, notes and records from their Japanese captors (see *Guide to the papers of Dr Rowley Richards*, Australian War Memorial website). Include some additional comments as to how you intend to protect your diary from discovery.

- During World War Two many Australian nurses were held as POWs in Japan. In small groups, prepare a magazine or website presentation on this topic. Some of this may be presented in direct interview format. Include what they knew of the dropping of the atomic bombs and the surrender of the Japanese in August 1945, and their reactions to both.

- An extensive amount of art exists, created by Allied POWs. Some examples from the Sandakan prison camp, by Bill Young, are featured in the program. From published sources (books, magazines, websites etc), each member of the class is to find and to display, explain and discuss one or two samples of art (no work of art should be identical from one student to another).

- The six-part Australian TV drama, *Changi*, looks fictionally at the lives of a group of men both when they were prisoners of war and decades later. After viewing, discuss such elements as the way the men’s experiences in the Changi prison camp are presented (whether realistically and accurately or not), the concept of mateship in adversity, and the effect on them, and on others, of their POW experiences in later years.

THE HOMEFRONT

In Australia from June 1942 onwards, wartime rationing of food, electricity, petrol and material for clothing was severe, as was the shortage of labour. Civilians began to practise evacuation procedures, women moved into the workforce, and 88,000 American troops entered the country.

- Research wartime daily life in Australia in preparation for this exercise. You are a relative or friend in Australia, of someone serving in the Pacific theatre of war; your life is affected by food and petrol rationing, power blackouts, military training manoeuvres, and the organising of prisoner of war relief mailings etc. Write a letter to your relative or friend.

- As a class, discuss then prepare a sequence of short, scripted episodes for a radio serial about an Australian family during the years 1944–45. Although fictional, you may draw on or refer to real events of the day. Produce and record the episodes for playback on your school’s intranet.

- “Over-paid, over-sexed and over here”: research then produce a daily newspaper page of news stories and interviews about the positive and negative affect on the lives of Australians at home of the influx of thousands of American military personnel. You may also wish to write a short story about any aspect of this topic.

- Prepare a magazine-style biography of Australian wartime prime minister John Curtin, who died only one month before the Japanese surrender. Assess the importance of his role during the war, his popularity among the Australian people, and whether his state of health interfered with his effectiveness as the nation’s political leader.

PROPAGANDA AND CENSORSHIP

Governments on both sides of the conflict broadcast information designed to show themselves in the best light, and to denigrate the enemy, with the aim of bolstering their own populace’s morale and lowering that of the opposing nations. Allied to this was strict media and postal censorship, conducted in order to suppress news about troop movements, military defeats and high casualty rates.

- Research and prepare a magazine item on the propaganda role of Radio Tokyo during World War Two. Include details about famous radio announcer “Tokyo Rose” (whose real name was Iva Toguri). Did the Australian Broadcasting Commission play a propaganda role in broadcasting to its own citizens and to troops overseas?

- Collect samples of, and discuss in class, the messages presented in both Australian and Japanese posters and newspaper cartoons of the era. Discuss whether or not racist attitudes expressed or depicted in wartime propaganda are justified.

- Taking press censorship and government propaganda into account, construct a newspaper front page, containing headlines, news reports and illustrations or photographs, of the kind that would have been published in Australia during the war on any “typical” day of the week.

ATOMIC WARFARE: HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI

The dropping of atomic bombs in August 1945 on the two Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki—the first time nuclear weapons had been used—has remained a contentious issue ever since.

- Write a report on the long-term effects and consequences of the atomic bomb blasts of 1945. Where necessary, include photographs, illustrations, graphs, medical reports, eyewitness accounts etc.
- Research and debate the issue as to whether, historically, the use of atomic weapons by the Americans on Japan was justified.
- Students may wish to screen and review the early Japanese *Godzilla* monster movies, looking at them as examples of how the atomic bomb blasts have permeated Japanese popular culture and consciousness.

POLITICS AND THE AUSTRALIAN-AMERICAN ALLIANCE

The program informs us that the years 1944–45 introduced a major political shift in Australia’s relationship with the USA.

- Working in groups, place the events of 1944–45 into a long-term historical context, by examining the development and reasoning for the political-military relationship between Australia and America from 1944 to the present. Each group should look at a specific era, then combine their findings, perhaps as a set of wall posters or as web pages. Points to cover include: the Japanese surrender in 1945, Korean War, Vietnam War, nuclear testing and the construction of American satellite tracking stations etc on Australian territory (including the importance of installations and American personnel at Woomera and elsewhere) and the two Gulf Wars in the Middle East.
- Personalise the Australian–American political relationship by writing a short story in any style and genre—eg spy, science fiction, comedy, romance, action/adventure, drama.

ROAD TO TOKYO: THE DOCUMENTARY AS FILM MEDIA

Documentary films about a past era often do not merely recapture and re-present the past; they may also be considered as new readings and new interpretations and reconstructions or even reinventions of that era for a contemporary audience.

- As a class, listen carefully to Jack Thompson’s scripted narration of *Road to Tokyo*. How much of it is objective and factual? Is it stylised? (Note, for example, the alternating use of present and past tense, and even future tense. What is the purpose of this?) Is opinion presented in the guise of fact? Is the narration emotive? (One example to examine may be the voice-over that accompanies the camera shot of Saipan civilians suiciding, where we are informed that “battle-hardened marines are horrified”.) Discuss why the filmmakers may have chosen Thompson’s voice in preference to that of any other voice actor.

- Discuss the following issues:

- whether *Road to Tokyo* offers an understanding of both Allied and Japanese wartime viewpoints

- whether the program argues Australia’s importance to the war effort through selective or even biased use of archival film, interview, reminiscence and expert commentary from Australian historians

- whether the program aims at a deeper purpose than the presentation of a “history lesson” for a modern audience

- Write your own TV guide review of *Road to Tokyo*, discussing what modern audiences may learn about wartime Australia from viewing the program.

SELECTED REFERENCES AND FURTHER RESOURCES

Books

Ivan Chapman, *Tokyo Calling: The Charles Cousens Case*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1990

Hugh Clarke, *Escape to Death: The Japanese Breakout at Cowra, 1944*, Random House, Sydney, 1994

David Day, *John Curtin: A Life*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 1999

Cameron Forbes, *Hellfire: The Story of Australia, Japan and the Prisoners of War*, Pan Macmillan Australia, 2005

David Horner, *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 1998

David Horner, *High Command: Australia’s Struggle for an Independent War Strategy, 1939–45*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982

Michael McKernan, *All In! Fighting the War at Home*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1995

Michael McKernan, *This War Never Ends: The Pain of Separation and Return*, UQP, Brisbane, 2001

Joanna Penglase and David Horner, *When the War Came to Australia: Memories of the Second World War*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1992

Rohan Rivett, *Behind Bamboo: An Inside Story of the Japanese Prison Camps*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1946

Rowley Richards, *A Doctor's War*, HarperCollins, Sydney, 2005

Rowley Richards and Marcia McEwan, *The Survival Factor*, Kangaroo Press, Sydney, 1989

Film/TV

Peter Butt (director), *When the War Came to Australia*, Look Films, 1992

Raymond Quint (director), *Return to Sandakan*, Film Australia, 1995

Paul Rudd and Ben Ulm (directors), *Colour of War—The Anzacs*, Film Australia, 2004

Graham Shirley (director), *Prisoners of Propaganda*, Film Australia, 1987

Kate Woods (director), *Changi*, ABC Television, 2001

Websites

Australian War Memorial (extensive links):
www.awm.gov.au

Australians at War Film Archive:
www.australiansatwarfilmarchive.gov.au/aawfa

Australians at War: www.australiansatwar.gov.au

Australians in Borneo, WW2:
www.borneo.com.au/general/auswar

ABC TV series, *Changi* (contains WW2 links):
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/programs/changi/>

A-Bomb WWW Museum (Hiroshima and Nagasaki):
http://www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp/index_e2.html

Field Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey: <http://monumentaaustralia.org.au/themes/people/military/display/105220-field-marshal-sir-thomas-blamey->

General MacArthur
(contains links to Emperor Hirohito, war crimes etc):
www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/macarthur

Oral history as a means of recording the past
(see Excerpt 2):
<http://www.teachingheritage.nsw.edu.au/section04/>

Tokyo Rose and the Australian connection
(see The Listening Room):
www.abc.net.au/classic/daily/stories/s629913.htm

Women as prisoners of war :
<http://hellfire-pass.commemoration.gov.au/australian-prisoners-in-the-asia-pacific/australian-nurses.php>

ROAD TO TOKYO

A Film Australia National Interest Program.
Produced with the assistance of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Writer/Director: Graham Shirley

Producer: Sally Regan

Executive Producers: Mark Hamlyn, Alison Leigh

Narrator: Jack Thompson

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