Picking up the Pieces

The Aftermath of Hiroshima

Smithsonian National Postal Museum
September 27, 2008
May 7, 1945
Nazi Germany signed unconditional surrender.
Allied Powers declared victory in Europe.
The Potsdam Declaration

July 26, 1945

Declaration issued at Potsdam set out requirements for Japan’s unconditional surrender
Potsdam Declaration

“...We call upon the government of Japan to proclaim now the unconditional surrender of all Japanese armed forces, and to provide proper and adequate assurances of their good faith in such action. The alternative for Japan is prompt and utter destruction.”
Hiroshima

August 6, 1945
August 15, 1945

“We have ordered our Government to communicate to the Governments of the United States, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union that Our Empire accepts the provisions of their joint Declaration.”

~Emperor Hirohito’s radio broadcast
Allied Occupation of Japan

- United States, Great Britain & Soviet Union would occupy Japan per Potsdam agreement
- United States began occupation immediately
- Soviet Union did not participate
- British Commonwealth arrived in Japan in February, 1946
Signing of Instrument of Surrender

September 2, 1945

200 Allied vessels gathered in Tokyo Bay to bear witness to the signing.

10 of the vessels were Australian.

HMAS Hobart, a light cruiser, took part in the Battle of the Coral Sea.
British Commonwealth Occupation Force

February, 1946

BCOF personnel faced bleak conditions

↑ Hiroshima Prefectural Industrial Promotional Hall – Ground Zero. Today this structure is Hiroshima Peace Memorial.

← Hiroshima was “like a graveyard where not a tombstone was left standing.” – J.G. Collins
Enter: The Black Market

- The Perfect Formula

- Influx of abundant military supplies
- Extreme local need
- Ingenious soldiers

= Black market
Post Office as accomplice

19 Australian military post offices in Japan
Australian soldiers would buy postage stamps at their base post office with money gained from black market activities.

Stamps would be sent to friends in Australia, who could exchange them for face value less 5%.

Ordinary Australian stamps sold at Australian military post offices in Japan.
The Fix: Overprint the Stamps

“The military authorities decided to overprint the stamps, which would render them only valid for postage from Japan, and unable to be exchanged at post offices in Australia.”

~ Australian Commonwealth Specialists’ Catalogue, 2006

→ Overprint proofs, Hiroshima Printing Co., October 1946
Unadopted overprints

Thin, wispy serif type did not show up well on dark stamps.

A bolder san serif type was made.
Here today; gone tomorrow

- Three overprinted values (½d, 1d, 3d) were released on October 12, 1946.
- Stamps were withdrawn 24 hours later until such time as “official authorizations” were acquired.
- Seven values of overprinted stamps finally “officially” released on May 9, 1947.
BCOF Overprints

The overprinted stamps as released on May 8, 1947

First Day of Issue Usage
Stamp collectors: Better than the Black Market

- The Perfect Formula, Part II

- New stamps in limited supply
- Keen stamp collectors
- Ingenious soldiers

= More money – and legal – than the black market
The Fix: Stamp rationing

[Stamp] “sales were restricted to authorized military personnel within Japan... Personnel were not allowed to purchase stamps having a face value in excess of ten shillings in any one day. Adequate justification had to be given...in order to make maximum purchase of stamps on a daily basis.”

~ Cyril Chambers, Minister of the Army, March 1949
The investigation

“The Australian Govt have ordered an enquiry into ramps of BCOF stamps. I was invited to give evidence on oath which I was only too glad to do… I advised unrestricted sale through the GPO in Australia and Australia House in London. I said the London market would require about 50,000 sets.”

~ Letter (shown) from Acting Brig. E. Percy Dickson to Maj. A. Walker, in London, April 29, 1948
BCOF overprints withdrawn

- Official use of BCOF stamps began May 8, 1947
- Official use of BCOF stamps ceased February 12, 1949 (20 months)
BCOF varieties

“HAPAN”

Wrong font “6”
BCOF varieties

“B” made from “1” and “3”
BCOF varieties

Doubled overprint
BCOF mail – common rates

- **Surface mail (free)**
- **Airmail (3 pence)**
- **Registered airmail (6 pence)**
- **Parcel mail (varied by weight)**
Unusual usage
Other BCOF used Australian military post offices

- Great Britain
- New Zealand
- India
Objectives – Why they were there

- Dispose of Japan’s stocks of war material, including chemical agents and ordnance.
- Repatriate returning Japanese soldiers.
- Assist in the reconstruction of Hiroshima.
- Honorably represent the British Commonwealth.
- Safeguard all Allied installments within the BCOF area.
- Promote the democratic way of life.

Achievements – What they did

- Cleared BCOF area of stockpiled war material, including 100,000 tons of explosives and 500 tons of poison gas.
- Repatriated 700,000 Japanese military personnel and civilians.
- Patrolled BCOF area by land and sea to suppress smuggling and illegal immigration.
- Built housing for dependants of Commonwealth military personnel eligible to bring their families to Japan (illustrating the “democratic way of life”).
- Provided humanitarian relief.
British Commonwealth occupation of Japan officially ended April 28, 1952.

Australians remained in Japan for several years thereafter, supporting military actions in Korea and Malaya.