

PROPAGANDA in 1943

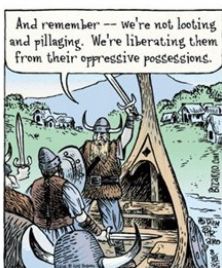
PROPAGANDA in AUSTRALIA in 1943

Propaganda in Australia in 1943

Dr Daryl Moran



A thorough and scholarly search through the oldest libraries in the world will reveal that propaganda has existed for many, many years and has incorporated calls to arms, even if they are tiny dinosaur front legs, a call to defend the empire, dad-type jokes humour and in the case of the Vikings, sometimes the real truth is hidden in the message and the way you say it!



PROPAGANDA in 1943

Propaganda can be defined as a form of communications that promotes a particular perspective or agenda by using text and images to often provoke an emotional rather than a rational response. It attempts to gain support and win 'hearts and minds' by shaping perceptions both on the home front and the front line of both sides.



- Uses **various forms** of communication to promote a desired perspective
- Uses **text** and **images** to provoke an **emotional** response
- 'Wins **hearts** and **minds**' by shaping perception to gain support

World War 1 was the first war in which the mass media played a significant part in disseminating news from the Fighting Front to the Home Front. It was also the first war to systematically target government produced propaganda at the general public. All the warring nations were compelled to recognise that they had to justify the righteousness of the war and, to this end, themes such as patriotism and nationalism played an important role. Governments sought to build their fighting forces and to reinforce the notion of the enemy and to target their vulnerabilities. It could be argued that World War 1 and subsequent modern wars required propaganda to achieve five key aims. 1. Mobilise hatred against the enemy. 2. To convince the population of the justness of the cause and to support the cause by all means. 3. To enlist the active support and cooperation of neutral countries. 4. To strengthen the support of allies. 5. To raise funds in times of financial need.



1. Mobilise hatred against enemy
2. To convince the population of the just cause
3. To enlist the active support and co-operation of neutral countries
4. To strengthen allies' support
5. To raise funds in times of needs

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The British in World War 1 placed immense reliance on propaganda to justify the war to the people, to help promote recruitment into the armed forces and to convince the population that their cause was just and that their sacrifices would be rewarded.



During both the First and Second World Wars, posters were an ideal method of communicating propaganda as they could be quickly produced and distributed. These posters used various emotional techniques to try to achieve a variety of ends. For example, stereo-types were used to justify the war, appeals to patriotism and loyalty to King and Country were sometimes replaced by blatant 'mobilisation by shame.' Women were often given the responsibility of encouraging and sometimes shaming men into enlisting.



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In both wars and once the initial euphoria ('war fever') had subsided, it was imperative to remind people, both at home and in the trenches, of what they were fighting for. The major themes included a call to arms and a request for war loans; as well as efforts to encourage industrial activity, to explain national policies, to channel emotions such as courage or hatred, to urge the population to conserve resources, and to tell the public of food and fuel substitutes.



In both wars, the monetary costs of both conflicts were immense and with extra resources and funds needed, governments launched public war loans programs to buy government war bonds, which would be repaid with interest after the war. The accompanying propaganda items, usually in poster form, combined patriotism with a sense of responsibility for citizens to financially back the war.

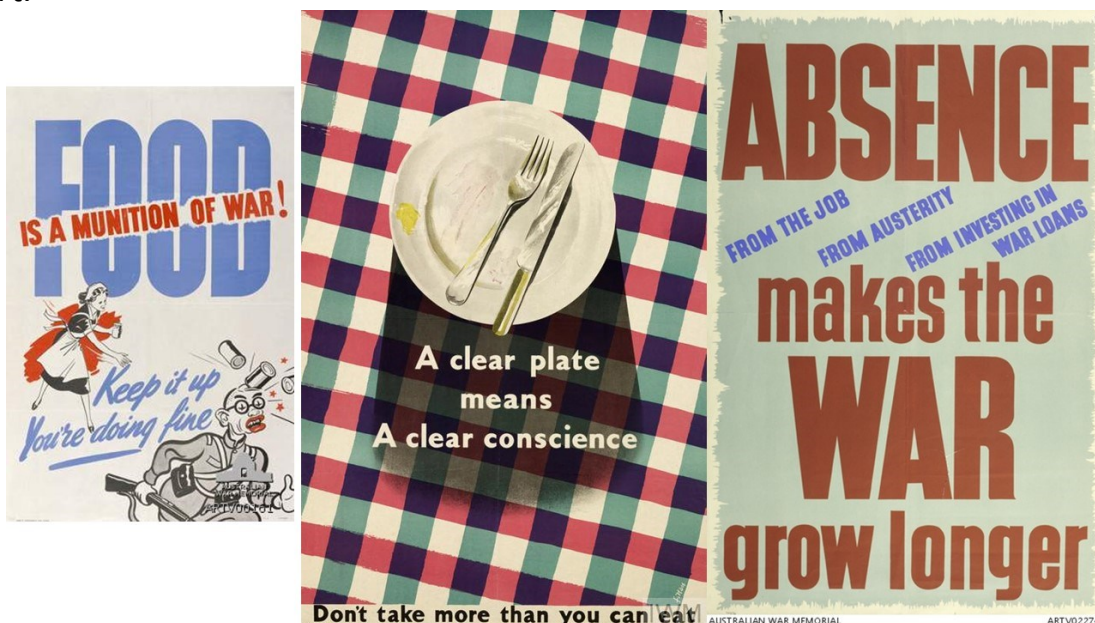


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Various forms of propaganda used in both wars, but mainly World War 2 also encouraged women to be actively involved in a wide variety of occupations, both civilian and military. In Australia, especially after the entry of Japan into the war in December 1941, agricultural labour was steadily diverted into the armed services and various war industries. Women's roles dramatically changed and propaganda played a large part in recruiting them into the various branches of the armed forces, Land Army, factories and shipyards.



Another use of propaganda and the winning of hearts and minds, and also stomachs, were various austerity campaigns. In 1943, John Curtin reinforced his words of a year earlier when he stated, 'Austerity calls for a pledge by the Australian people to strip every selfish comfortable habit, every luxurious impulse, every act, word and deed that retards the victory march.' Posters such as these educated Australians on how they could help the war effort.



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In 1939 Australia created the Department of Information to direct the flow of information within Australia and to take the lead in propaganda and censorship activities. In general terms, their work was aimed at promoting the necessity of Australia's freedom as well as its defence from foreign invasion, of influencing morale both at home and in the armed forces, and influencing the civilians of enemy countries. For example, posters were devised that aimed to highlight the threat of Japanese invasion and a climate of fear. Ideas of home, patriotism and confidence in the security of the country were emphasised. Some 94 films and newsreels were also produced by the Department during the war for domestic and overseas consumption.



But in addition, propaganda was used to strengthen home security, especially heightened in 1942 and 1943, when Japanese invasion seemed imminent. This poster for example, was released to remind Australians of the dangers of war-related gossip and of speaking in disloyal ways.



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'It's fight, work or perish' said Prime Minister John Curtin in an appeal to the Australian people during these difficult times, when rationing and blackout restrictions were introduced. Children were encouraged to collect materials to be recycled for the war effort as well as being encouraged to dig air raid shelters and to identify enemy aircraft flying overhead and reporting to the Voluntary Air Observer's Corp.



As with similar organisations in many belligerent countries during World War 2, a key feature of the many activities of Australia's Department of Information was to build morale which was recognised as *'the capacity of a group of people to pull together persistently and consistently in pursuit of a common purpose.'*

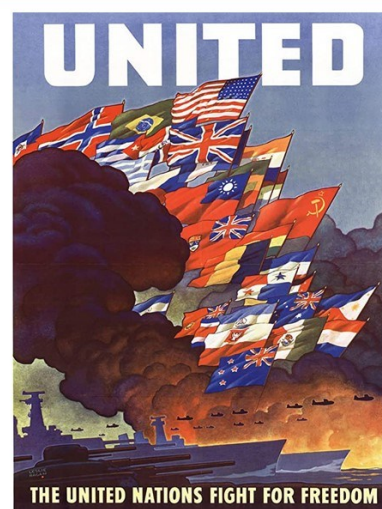
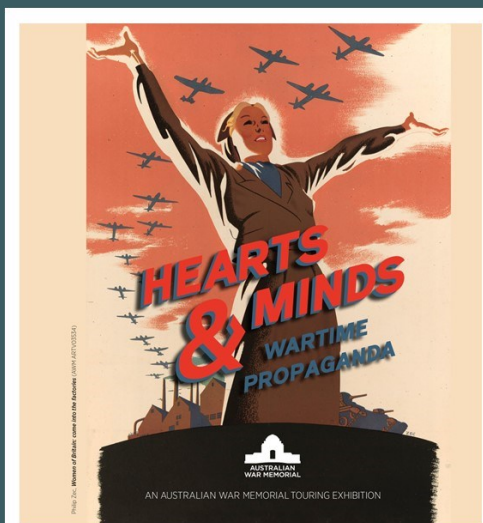


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Perhaps the stereotypical example of the role of propaganda is its portrayal of the enemy. It has been claimed that by demonising the enemy, governments not only build fear, but also justify their involvement in the war. We can point to many examples in World War 2 that depict the enemy as inhumane, criminal, barbaric, autocratic, dictatorial and a threat to national values and perhaps it was easier to fight the enemy if they seem less than human?



We have seen that in essence, propaganda is about winning 'hearts and minds' on both sides of the conflict. While this might be manifested in recruitment drives, war loans, calls for austerity, encouraging women to serve in a variety of services and organisations, stereotyping and demonising the enemy, curbing gossip as in 'loose lips sink ships,' or indeed justifying the cause and reasons for the good fight, propaganda will always have a critical place in times of conflict.



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Our understanding of the role of propaganda in Australia during World War 2 can be further enhanced by looking at two prime examples from 1943, namely the sinking of the Australian Hospital Ship *Centaur* and the launch of Australia's first Academy Award winning film, '*Kokoda Front Line*.' In both cases, different propaganda media were used to achieve similar outcomes. Let's look at the sinking of the Australian Hospital Ship *Centaur* first of all.



Under the Hague Convention X of 1907, the articles specifically laid down for hospital ships stated the following. 'Hospital ships must be painted white. Military hospital ships must have a green band painted around them. They must fly a red cross flag in addition to their national flag and they should give assistance to wounded personnel of all nationalities.' This document was signed by 25 countries as well as the Empire of Japan.

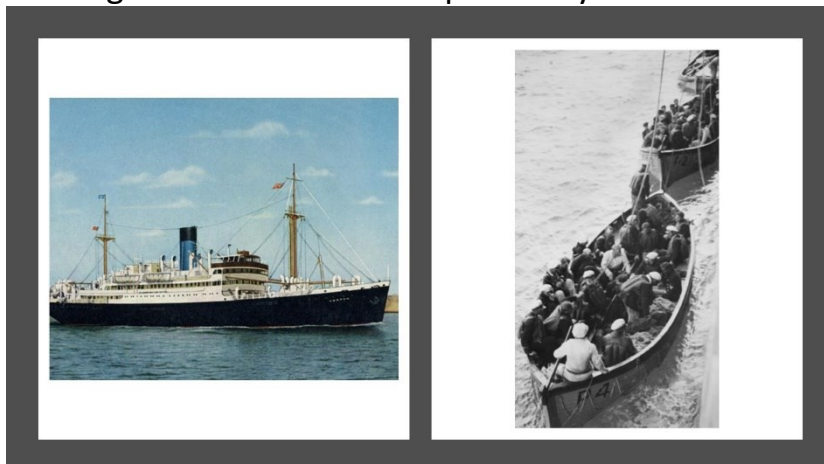


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During World War 2 Australia principally used six hospital ships of various shapes and sizes with ownership split between Australia, Britain and the Netherlands. The Netherlands handed over to Australia the liners *Oranje*, *Maetsuycker* and *Tasman* and paid for their crew and conversion to hospital ships. The *Manunda* and *Wanganella* were Australian motorships converted to hospital ships, while the sixth, the merchant ship the *Centaur* was British owned.



The *Centaur* was built in Scotland and launched in 1924 by the Ocean Steamship Company to fill the role of a combination passenger liner and refrigerated cargo ship. She was one of the first civilian ships to be equipped with a diesel engine and was constructed as a shallow draught vessel capable of resting on the tidal mud flats of various ports in the northern end of WA. She operated on the trading route between her home port in Fremantle West Australia and then to Singapore via Indonesia carrying about 72 passengers, cargo and about 450 livestock. After entering service in 1924 she plied her route without much excitement, apart from 26th November 1941, when an aircraft searching for the missing HMAS *Sydney* spotted a lifeboat carrying 60 or so sailors. Being in the vicinity, the *Centaur* was directed to the area and lowered food to the boat. Their identity was revealed their identity as the survivors of the German raider the *Kormoran* which had engaged *Sydney* in battle. The *Centaur's* master proceeded to tow the lifeboat to Carnarvon where the German sailors were reunited with another hundred survivors and under heavy armed guard were then transported by *Centaur* to Fremantle.



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In late 1942, it became clear to the Australian Government that the *Manunda*, *Wanganella* and *Oranje* would not be able to operate in the shallow type waters of Southeast Asia, so a new hospital ship was required. The British Ministry of Shipping placed the *Centaur* at the disposal of the Australian authorities in early January 1943 and its conversion to a hospital ship in Melbourne began with the addition of an operating theatre, dispensary, two wards which were now located on the former cattle decks, a dental surgery and accommodation for 75 crew and sixty permanent army medical staff. It was at this time she was painted with the markings of a hospital ship as outlined in Article 5 of the tenth Hague Convention of 1907 and previously mentioned. At night, both internal and external lighting meant that these markings were clearly visible. In addition, the data on the ship's markings and the layout of identifying structural features was provided to the International Committee of the Red Cross during the first week of February 1943, who passed this on to the Japanese on 5th February 1943.

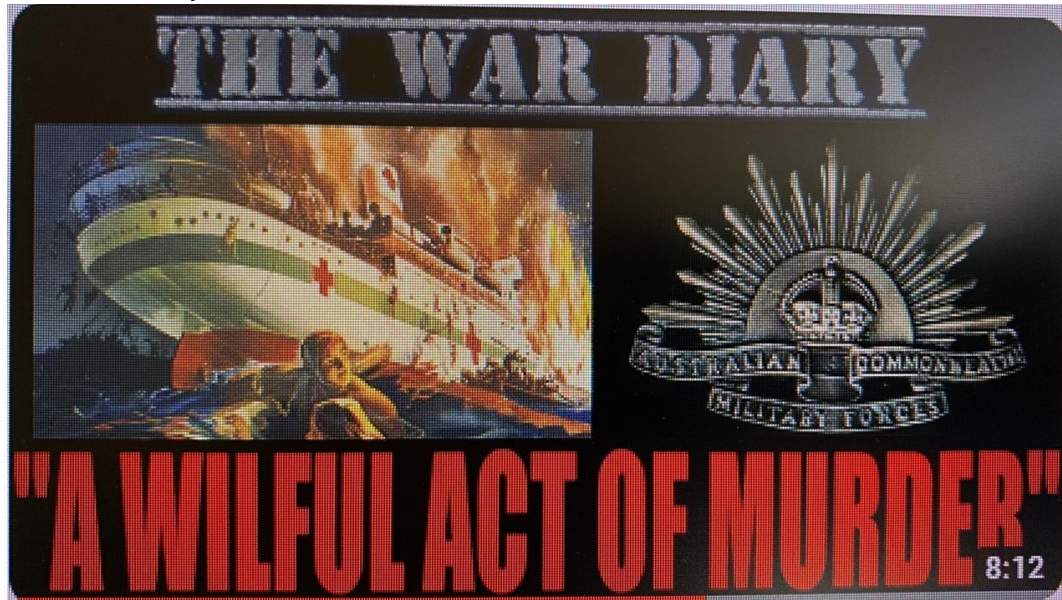


Centaur was eventually commissioned as an Australian Hospital Ship on 1st March 1943 and entered operations on 12th March. Following a trial run from Melbourne to Sydney delivering medical personnel to Port Moresby, she returned to Brisbane with Australian and American wounded along with some wounded Japanese POW's. Continuing on to Sydney and arriving on 8th May 1943, she was re-provisioned before departing for Cairns on 12th May, from where her destination again was New Guinea.



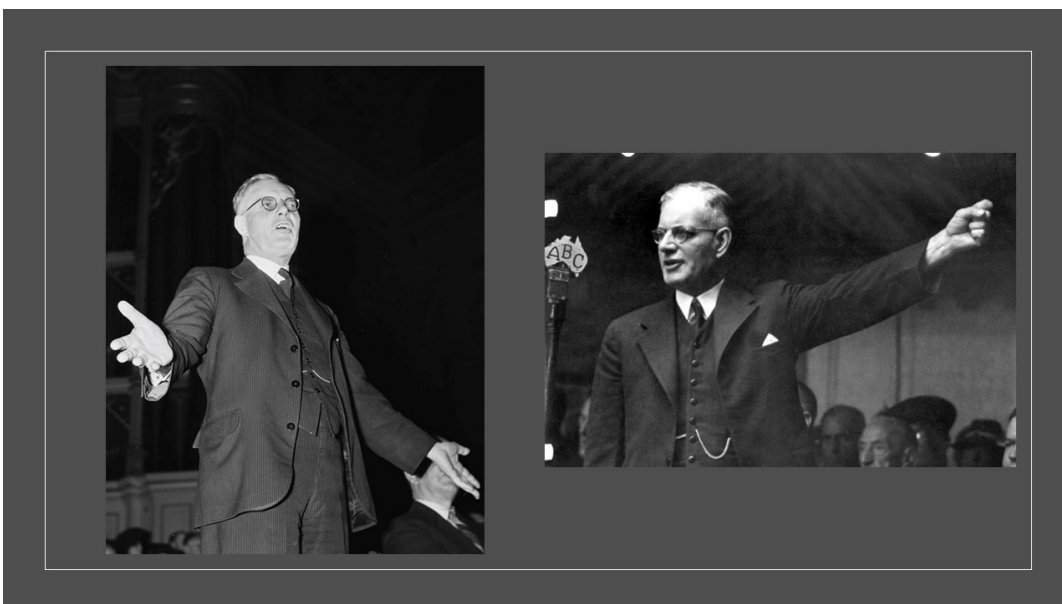
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Let's now watch this short film as we follow her on her final journey. I would ask you to overlook a couple of obvious errors in the film, for example when the commentary says the ship sank bow first and the footage shows a ship sinking by the stern. But the passion and intention of the filmmaker is obvious, especially at the very end of the film when he pays tribute to a family member lost on the Centaur.



View 'The Sinking of the Centaur' - [\(1\) WW2 Japanese War Crimes Against Australia: 2/3 AHS Centaur - "A Wilful Act of Murder" - YouTube](#)

In the days following the sinking, Prime Minister John Curtin vowed that Australia would avenge the deaths of the Medical Corps and the ship's crew. On Empire Day, 23 May 1943, Curtin made an impassioned plea for Australians to lift their support for the war effort. He urged an end to industrial hold-ups in mines, workshops, factories and on wharves. Newspapers then reported that colour posters were being created to depict the torpedoing of the *Centaur*.



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Much research went into the posters to showing the reality of the sinking. Bob Whitmore, a commercial artist of Sydney transformed *Centaur* survivors' reports into two graphic posters. Sister Savage for instance, told authorities that *Centaur* went down by its bow. Survivors also reported that the lighting went out immediately the ship was struck. Diesel engines, which drove the ship, do not smoke, so the posters depict *Centaur's* funnel without smoke, a fierce fire and people jumping from the ship. One of Whitmore's posters shows a solitary life-boat near the sinking vessel and in the other, a woman and a man cling to debris in the oily sea.

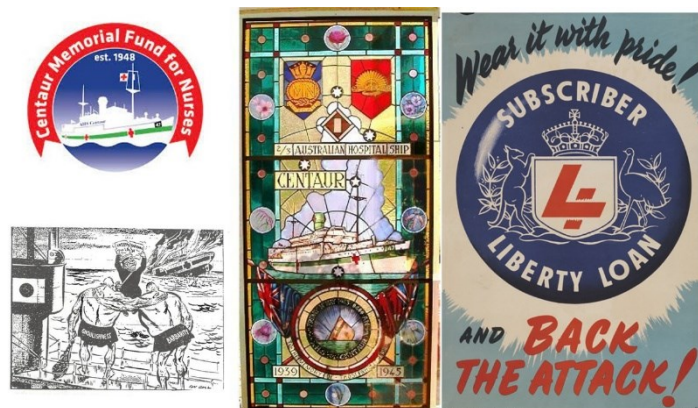


Curtin's message to the Australian people to 'work or fight' had been expanded. One slogan reads: 'WORK SAVE FIGHT and SO AVENGE THE NURSES'. The other reads 'SAVE for the BRAVE - Let us Avenge the Nurses'. The posters were sent to factories, workshops, wharves, coal mines and business establishments, and other places of work. The eleven Australian Army Nursing Service nurses who had died, were clearly front and centre in this propaganda campaign.



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Apart from being used for propaganda purposes, the tragedy was also remembered in some very practical and fitting ways. From 1943 onwards, the *Centaur* quickly became a symbol of Australian determination to win the war. This attack on a clearly marked and illuminated hospital ship, was taken as further evidence by our country that Australia faced a brutal and uncompromising enemy. The posters that now appeared to raise money for war loans showed the sinking ship and carried the words 'Avenge The Nurses'. Over 1.16 billion pounds was raised from War Loans during World War 2. In 1948 the *Centaur* Memorial Fund For Nurses in Queensland raised the enormous sum, for the period, of fifty thousand pounds. This money was invested to fund activities in memory of the nurses who went down with the ship.



When a mosaic was put in place commemorating the women's services in the Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial, it was the image of the *Centaur* which was used to illustrate the sacrifice involved in such service. It is the only reference in the Hall to an actual event in any of the wars in which Australians have fought and died. It is symbolised by the engulfing waves of the sea into which sinks the 'sea-centaur', a symbol of the hospital ship being sunk with the only female survivor being a nurse. This mosaic symbolises the courage of Australian women in war and reminds us of all Australians who served in war and have no graves but the sea. In the case of the *Centaur*, we can see how the tragic sinking was used by the propaganda machine of wartime to demonise the enemy, to justify the rightness of the allied cause, to encourage austerity and to raise funds for war loans.



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Let us now turn to another medium in Australia in which propaganda was used, the newsreel. Cinesound Review, owned by Greater Union pictures and Movietone News, owned by the US company 20th Century Fox, were the only two Australian newsreel companies to operate during the war. In the case of many wartime productions, the Department of Information camera men, such as Damien Parer, would travel to battlefields or go 'into country' to film as much material as they could. This unedited film was sent back to be processed in Sydney and then both companies were given the same footage material to edit and produce in their own style.



Around the world, the advent of the newsreels shown at the picture theatres became vital for the dissemination of information and their finest hour arrived during World War 2. Today, eighty years after March 1943 when it won Australia's first Academy Award, we pay tribute to the newsreel, '*Kokoda Front Line*' which was filmed by Damien Parer in New Guinea in July and August of 1942. It should be noted that in the 94-year history of the Academy Awards, no newsreel from any other country has ever achieved that distinction.



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A key figure in the Australian film industry of the 1930's and 1940's was Ken G Hall who worked for Cinesound. He had produced films with Australian comedians Roy 'Mo' Rene and George Wallace and had also produced the four Dad and Dave series of films. With the advent of war, film production ground to a stop at Cinesound and newsreels becoming their main staple of production.



Damien Parer had built a solid reputation especially through his work in the Western Desert, Greece and Syria. But his finest work was still to come, when in mid-1942 he accompanied Kanga Force operating against the Japanese around Wau and Salamaua. It should be noted that Parer never filmed any actual combat in New Guinea, but staged a re-enactment of various incidents from a raid on Salamaua by the commandoes. Parer never intended to deceive his audiences and in fact, clearly labelled these actions on his films as re-enactments.

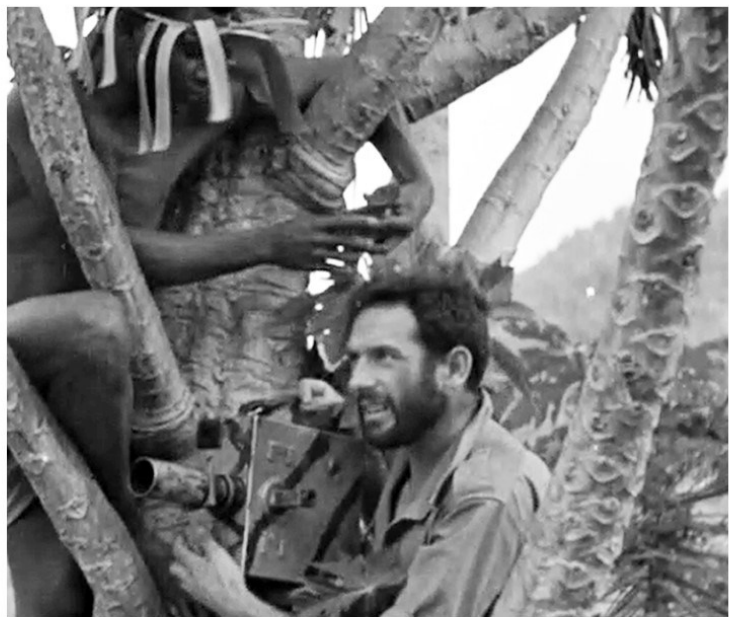
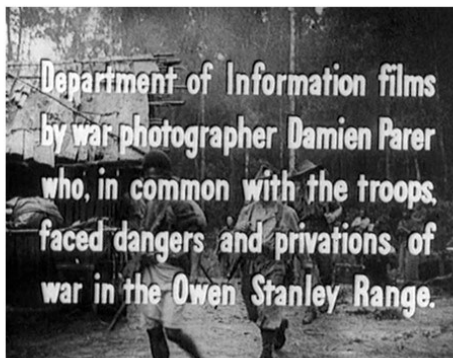


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In very brief detail, the Australian 39th Battalion had encountered a Japanese invading force after they had crossed the Owen Stanley Range and were forced back to Isurava on the Kokoda Track. Parer teamed up with the ABC broadcaster Chester Wilmot and they were given permission to accompany the 21st Brigade when they marched over the Kokoda Track to relieve the 39th Battalion at Isurava.

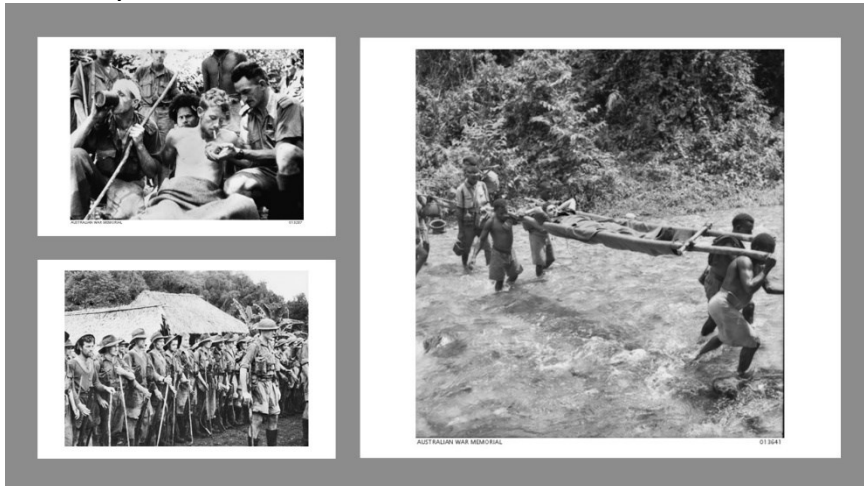


Parer began filming at Myola as the 2/14th and 2/16th Battalions awaited supplies. He filmed the airdrop and then the advance of the two battalions at Eora Creek. Sometimes he left the track to film the troops against the jungle background, to show how their khaki uniforms stood out against the green background of the jungle.



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Parer filmed the withdrawal of the troops and to be able to keep filming, he discarded some of his still cameras and cans of film. When we watch the newsreel in a moment or two, if you look carefully, you can see he was able to smuggle them out underneath the blankets on stretchers carrying the wounded. He features Papuan stretcher bearers and a Salvation army officer lighting a cigarette for a wounded soldier. The climax of the film is the parade showing the relief of the 39th Battalion and them being congratulated by their commander, Lt. Col. Ralph Honner.



Parer returned to Australia and worked with Ken G Hall edited and produced 'Kokoda Front Line' ready for its release on September 17th 1942. The current National Film and Sound Archivist makes the following comments about the film. *'This newsreel presented audiences with visuals of the war unlike any they had ever seen. The shots of the troops trudging through the thick tropical jungle and being hauled on stretchers over narrow muddy passages, stood in stark contrast to the open battlefields of Europe. It was the first time that audiences had seen the gruelling conditions under which the campaign in the Pacific was being fought, a war that seemed until this point 'a million miles away' (as Parer notes in his opening address to camera). Parer's experience filming in New Guinea convinced him that people back in Australia needed to realise that the war was closer than they thought. He wanted to shake people out of their complacency and alert them to the urgency and importance of the campaign.'*



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Unusually for a war newsreel, there is no actual fighting in *Kokoda Front Line!* That the Japanese were 'masters of camouflage and deception' is represented through their very absence from the film. Instead, Cinesound's chief director, Ken G Hall, created intense drama from Parer's footage through showing the physical and emotional battle of the troops in rugged and unwelcoming terrain. Parer placed himself ahead of the troops, often filming from precarious locations in order to present the steep inclines and narrowness of the track. Lugging his 35mm camera and film stock (which only lasted for one minute at a time), Parer's determination to present an emotionally true account of events as he saw them, resulted in some of the most memorable images of the Second World War. Standout sequences include the Papuan stretcher bearers carrying the wounded over fast-flowing rivers and up steep inclines and probably the most famous of all – members of the Battalion, framed from the waist down, trudging through ankle-thick mud along the track.

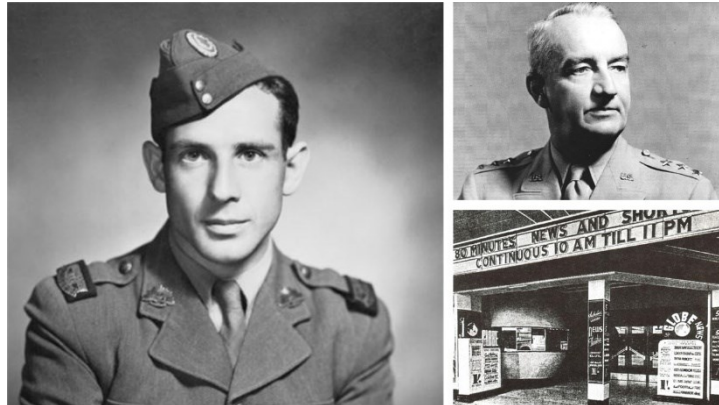


An extra level of believability was created in Cinesound's edition from Parer's introductory speech to camera which is reprised in the closing moments of the film). It is Parer's measured sincerity and first-person account of events in New Guinea which give the film its weight. Parer's pictures say a lot on their own, but newly returned from the front-lines, with Kokoda still on his mind, Parer convincingly and urgently argues that the war is 'just outside our door'.



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Film footage usually took weeks to reach Australia and newspapers and radio had already covered the events, but because the film was so current, its impact was greater than any other newsreel during the war. Queues stretched for city blocks outside city theatres as audiences clamoured to see it. Images of the reality of the Kokoda Track were clear for all to see and Macarthur's field commander Eichelberger, invited Parer to a private screening of the film and afterwards on his advice, ensured that all American uniforms were dyed jungle-green. Although he had not been able to film any combat action, Parer's film is remarkably accurate for a 1940's propaganda film and brought home to Australia the realities of jungle fighting in New Guinea. So, let's see it for ourselves right now.



VIEW 'KOKODA FRONT LINE' - ([1](#)) [Kokoda Front Line - YouTube](#)

In March 1943 the American Academy of Motion Picture Arts judged it worthy of an Oscar, but due to wartime restrictions on civilian use of metals such as copper, the director Ken G Hall received a smaller substitute made of gunmetal. After the war a genuine trophy weighing four kilograms was forwarded to him which now resides in a temperature controlled safe at Canberra's National Film and Sound Archive and is inscribed' *To Kokoda Front Line! for its effectiveness in portraying simply yet forcefully the scene of war in New Guinea and for its moving presentation of the bravery and fortitude of our Australian comrades in arms.*' Damien Parer left the Department of Information and was hired by Paramount Films and was killed on 17th September 1944 filming US Marines on the island of Peleliu. Ken G Hall later became the first General Manager of Channel 9 in Sydney.



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'Kokoda Front Line' paralleled with Curtin's austerity campaign of that year and gave extra weight to the 'call to arms' he was then espousing. A contemporary reviewer said, *'The rhetorical style of the narration would have heightened the newsreel audience's sense that Australia was in jeopardy and their realisation that the men seen here were all that stood between them and imminent invasion. Not only is the narration eloquent in itself but it also provides an extraordinary reminder that a film made for propaganda purposes can nevertheless be emotionally truthful in some circumstances.'* This newsreel in no short order became a key element in the government's propaganda war to drive home the danger that Australia faced in late 1943 and that there was a desperate need for the whole nation to commit themselves to 'fighting the good fight.'

The Australian War Memorial is featuring *Kokoda Front Line!* in its touring exhibition, *ACTION! Film and War*, currently on show until 28 May 2023 at the Museum of Tropical Queensland (MTQ).



Senior Curator Daniel Eisenberg (MTQ) says the real impact of Parer's work is how real and visceral it made the war, bringing it to people at home.

"Though the film was edited as a piece of wartime propaganda, the reality of the conditions and experiences of those on the track cannot be diminished,"

We began today by noting that propaganda has existed in various forms for a great deal of time. Although we can be pretty sure that the images we saw at the beginning are meant to be taken in fun, we can be certain that in all ages and epochs, that propaganda has always existed to make paramount for governments and other rulers that the battle to win hearts and minds is always there to be won. Although we might find coloured paper posters and old fashioned black and white newsreel particularly quaint when measured against the might of today's digital technology, nonetheless, in their day the story of the Centaur and Kokoda Front Line played very significant roles in persuading our Australian forebears to hold the line and to ensure that they fought, worked and did not perish.

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At the outset of today we saw that, 'Propaganda can be defined as a form of communications that promotes a particular perspective or agenda by using text and images to often provoke an emotional rather than a rational response. It attempts to gain support and win 'hearts and minds' by shaping perceptions both on the home front and the front line of both sides.' Certainly, the case of the Sinking of the Centaur and the award-winning newsreel Kokoda Front Line are excellent examples of this definition.

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Dr Daryl Moran

