UNIT 4—AREA OF STUDY 1: RISES THAT TESTED THE NATION, 1929–1945

14 AUGUST 1945
Japan surrenders, ending Australia's involvement in war

8 MAY 1945
Germany surrenders, ending war in Europe

19 AUGUST 1944
Defeat of referendum proposing expanded Commonwealth powers for post-war reconstruction

1 MAY 1944
Curtin attends the first Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference in London

DECEMBER 1942
Department of Post-war Reconstruction established

MAY–JUNE 1942
The Battles of the Coral Sea and Midway stem the southward advance of the Japanese fleet

17 MARCH 1942
General Douglas MacArthur arrives in Australia

16 FEBRUARY 1942
Curtin insists on return of two Australian divisions to defend Australia, against British wishes

15 FEBRUARY 1942
Singapore falls to Japan; 16000 Australian soldiers become prisoners of war

19 FEBRUARY 1942
Japan bombs Darwin, killing approx. 250 (first of 100+ raids of northern Australia)

17 SEPTEMBER 1939
Curtin insists on return of two Australian divisions to defend Australia, against British wishes

16 SEPTEMBER 1939
Nazi Germany invades Poland; United Kingdom declares war on Germany; Australia's prime minister Robert Menzies (LAP) announces Australia's entry into conflict

9 SEPTEMBER 1939
National Security Act gives federal government wide-reaching powers

7 OCTOBER 1941
ALP assumes government under Prime Minister Curtin

7 DECEMBER 1941
Japan enters war by bombing US fleet at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii

12: WORLD WAR II (1939-1945)
TOPIC 1: CAUSES OF AUSTRALIA'S INVOLVEMENT

KEY KNOWLEDGE
The causes of Australia's involvement in World War II, including loyalty to Britain and the threat of Japanese invasion.

Advice: You are required to show an understanding of the reasons why Australia became involved in World War II, which, unlike World War I, came to Australia's shores. Most adults in 1939 had memories of World War I and they approached this new war with less romantic and more realistic attitudes. The direct Japanese threat to Australia prompted a shift in Australia's longstanding sense of loyalty to, and strategic relationship with, Britain, and a closer association with the United States.

LOYALTY TO BRITAIN
Loyalty and the fact that Australia was constitutionally bound to Britain (having not yet ratified the Statute of Westminster—see page 69) were the initial reasons Australia became involved in World War II in 1939. From the late 1930s, there were fears of Japanese aggression and a belief that war could, at some stage, involve Australia directly. However, Australians also believed that Britain could and would protect them, and that the British colony of Singapore was an 'impenetrable fortress.'

When Prime Minister Robert Menzies announced Australia's entry to the war in 1939 he said: 'Great Britain has declared war upon [Germany] and ... as a result, Australia is also at war. ... There can be no doubt that where Britain stands, here stand the people of the entire British world.'

Author Garry Disher writes:
As it had done in the First World War, Australia followed the British lead and became involved in a war against a country many thousands of miles away. Australia took this course of action because of the very strong ties with Britain in forms of trade, defence, family links, investment, the legal and parliamentary systems and style of living. Many Australians felt proud to be part of the British Empire and felt that it was their duty to help Britain.

Early in 1940, Australian troops were dispatched to Europe and the Middle East to support the British war effort. Fears of the Japanese threat subsided for a time, but did not disappear.

THE JAPANESE THREAT
Even before the British declaration of war on Germany, there had been growing anxiety about Japanese expansion in the South-East Asian region. During the 1930s, Japan invaded Manchuria, Korea and China. However, there was a belief that the British fleet, stationed in Singapore, could protect Australia.

On 7 December 1941, the Japanese entered the war by bombing the US fleet at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. The same night the Japanese bombed Singapore and landed at the northern end of the Malay Peninsula at Kota Bharu.

On 8 December 1941, Prime Minister John Curtin made Australia's first independent declaration of war. He also made it clear that Australia could not rely on Britain for support and that:

The Australian Government ... regards the Pacific struggle as primarily one in which the United States and Australia must have the fullest say in the direction of the democracies' fighting plan.

Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.

On 15 February 1942, Singapore fell to the Japanese and approximately 16,000 Australian soldiers became prisoners of war. Many were later to work on the Thai–Burma Railway.

On 19 February 1942, the Japanese launched a bombing raid on Darwin, killing approximately 250 people. This was the first of over 100 Japanese bombing raids across Northern Australia in the coming months.

TOPIC 2: AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

KEY KNOWLEDGE
The responses of the Australian government to the war crisis over the period 1939–1945, including the management of the different phases of the war, the expansion of the role of central government, the regulations imposed on the home population to support the war effort, the growth in manufacturing, directions for post-war reconstruction and a shift towards closer ties to the United States.

Advice: You are required to recognise that the Australian government adopted many measures at different times according to the type and degree of threat at the time. There were five prime ministers during the war (Robert Menzies, Arthur Fadden, John Curtin, Francis Forde and Ben Chifley).
MINDMAP: PHASES OF THE WAR

Initial Phase (1939-1941)
- National Security Act passed (8 September 1939), giving federal government wide-reaching powers (blank cheque)
- Petrol rationed
- Limited censorship introduced
- 'Enemy aliens' (immigrants) forced to register—some imprisoned
- Public holidays reduced
- Country got on war footing, particularly after France falls to Germany (June 1940)
- 2nd AIF (Australian Infantry Force) announced and recruitment begins—force of 20,000 men promised
- Women's auxiliary services created: air force (March 1941), army (August 1941), navy (July 1942)
- Political upheaval as uAP government is replaced by Curtin's ALP government

Final Phase (1944-1945)
- Fears of invasion ease and victory in war is in sight
- Repatriation programs established for returned soldiers, e.g. housing, education and medical care
- Department of immigration established, with plan to bring in European migrants and refugees in addition to British
- Depression-recovery schemes such as slum reclamation and housing renewal resume
- Increase in black market trading
- Increase in industrial strikes
- Referendum proposing expansion of government powers

Crisis Phase (1942-1944)
- Manpower laws introduced under Directorates of Manpower
- US troops welcomed to Australia
- 'Enemy aliens' interned (imprisoned)
- Women's Land Army established
- Industrial strikes decrease
- Severe penalties introduced for buying or selling rationed goods without coupon
- Department of Post-war Reconstruction established (1941)
- MG0 taken over by army—grand final held at Princes Park
- Melbourne Cup held on Saturday to avoid public holiday (1942-44)
- Australia moves from reliance on Britain towards US
- British PM Churchill directs two Australian divisions to Burma to assist British but Australian PM Curtin insists they return to defend Australia (16 February 1942)
- Tea, sugar, petrol, clothing and alcohol rationed
- Luxuries such as cosmetics hard to acquire
- Blackouts and brownouts: use of street lights, car headlights and public lighting restricted so as to make towns and cities hard for enemy aircraft to see
- Office of Wartime Organization oversees most regulations
- Women encouraged to enter services and workforce
- Conscription extended to include service in South East Asia
- Newspapers, radio and mail censored for reasons of security and morale
- Government response is at its most intense as Australia faces real threat of invasion—National Security Act imposes controls on many aspects of life

EXPANSION OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
Despite the crisis of the war, the ordinary business of government continued.

- In 1939, the National Security Act was introduced, giving the federal government far-reaching powers which overrode many state powers, such as rationing laws. The power to levy income tax (pay as you earn or PAYE) led to a significant increase in federal power.
- In 1942 and 1943, the federal government introduced new welfare benefits—widow pensions, unemployment benefits and changes to the maternity allowances.
- Planning for post-war reconstruction was led by the federal government, even though many features (such as education and housing) were state matters.
HOME-FRONT RESTRICTIONS
Under the National Security Act (1939), numerous regulations affected daily life in Australia. Many of these regulations are identified in the Phases of the War Mindmap (see pages 66–67). The aims of these regulations were to:

- Allow the government to adopt the powers needed in wartime.
- Save scarce resources and finance the war.
- Provide enough labour to keep enlistments high while continuing administration, manufacturing and farming.
- Keep the country and its citizens safe.

Examples of regulations that had a significant impact on the home population were the manpower laws, censorship laws, and the rationing regulations (see next page).

THE GROWTH IN MANUFACTURING
Trade restrictions and the war on Australia’s doorstep led to the expansion of existing industries and the development of new ones. For example:

- The steel industry in Broken Hill, Newcastle and Whyalla expanded to support the war effort – ships, aircraft motors, tanks, weapons and ammunition were produced in Australia.
- Uniforms, meteorological equipment, food processing and canning assisted the war effort.
- Textiles, footwear, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, china, household goods and musical instruments were produced for the home front.
- Many women worked in munitions, such as the Fishermans Bend munitions factory.

POST-WAR RECONSTRUCTION

- The Department of Post-war Reconstruction was established in December 1942, indicating that rebuilding was a priority well before the war was over.
- New welfare provisions, including pensions and a maternity allowance, were introduced in 1942. Plans were made for post-war immigration, housing, education and economic growth.

REGULATIONS THAT HAD A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE HOME POPULATION

**Manpower Laws**

- **Year Introduced:** 1942
- **Purpose:** Ensure workers are available for essential services
- **Key Agency:** Directorate of Manpower
- **Implementation:** Workers in ‘non-essential’ roles (barbers, pastry cooks, beauticians, musicians) redirected into factory work, food processing or manufacture of uniforms.
- **Outcome:** 600,000+ workers redirected by late 1942
- **Key Quote:** ‘The Deputy Manpower Director said yesterday 600 women were wanted immediately to can peaches for the troops. Women doing low priority work should transfer to this urgent job for two months.’ (Sydney Morning Herald)

**Rationing**

- **Year Introduced:** From 1940
- **Purpose:** Preserve scarce resources so they can be used for troops; export goods to Britain; discipline population and increase commitment to war
- **Key Agency:** Rationing Commission
- **Implementation:** Coupons required to purchase petrol, tea, sugar, butter, meat and clothing
- **Outcome:** By 1943, hoarding makes shortages worse, and black market develops for goods
- **Key Quote:** ‘The great challenge today is ... to forget self and order one’s life for the welfare of the nation ... By doing so, we will ... meet the tasks of war but also the tasks of peace.’ (John Curtin)

**Censorship**

- **Year Introduced:** 1940
- **Purpose:** Initially designed to prevent information from falling into enemy hands
- **Key Agency:** Department of Information
- **Implementation:** Government checks newspapers, radio, letters to and from servicepeople, cinema newsreels present positive view of war, e.g. report deaths from Darwin bombing as 17 (real number 243)
- **Outcome:** Accepted in the crisis years, but by late 1943 journalists and the public resent limits to freedom of speech
- **Key Quote:** ‘(The Australian press) behaved more like the propaganda arm of the government than a genuine free agency.’ (Robert Bell)

INCREASING INDEPENDENCE FROM BRITAIN / CLOSER TIES WITH THE UNITED STATES

Over the course of World War II, Australia developed a closer relationship with the United States, increasingly relying on them as an ally. Over the same period, ties to Britain were strained.

INCREASING INDEPENDENCE FROM BRITAIN

- As the war reached Singapore, it became evident to Prime Minister Curtin that Britain (whose troops were occupied with the war in Europe) could not be relied upon to protect Australia. The 'Cablegram War' (1942) between Curtin and British prime minister Winston Churchill over the deployment of Australian troops is evidence of Curtin's refusal to be dictated to by Britain.
- The 1942 ratification of the Statute of Westminster (1931) then formalised Australia's right as a British Dominion to govern independently and paved the way for a new ally in the United States.

68 CRISIS THAT TESTED THE NATION, 1929-1945

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**EVIDENCE OF CLOSER USTIES**

- Prime Minister Curtin stated, ‘We look to America’ for help in the Pacific theatre of the war against Japan (December 1941).
- General Douglas MacArthur, commander of Allied forces in the Pacific, arrived in Australia to take charge of the Pacific War (March 1942).
- Over one million US troops were based in Australia (1942–45), reaching a peak at any one time of 250,000.
- The US-led Battle of the Coral Sea (May 1942) halted the Japanese invasion of Port Moresby.
- The US-led Battle of Midway (June 1942) halted the Japanese naval advance south.
- Australian families were encouraged to make American soldiers welcome.

However, there were challenges to the US relationship. Tensions appeared towards the end of the war between American and Australian troops, and also when the US directed Australian troops to ‘mop-up’ operations in New Guinea and Borneo, rather than play an active role in defeating the Japanese.

Neither was the British alliance severed entirely. The Duke of Gloucester, brother of the king, was appointed governor-general in 1943; he took up the role two years later. Announcing the appointment, Prime Minister Curtin said:

> Australians will be deeply appreciative of His Majesty’s action in appointing a member of the Royal Family to be Governor-General of Australia. All in the country will look forward with affectionate and loyal interest to the arrival again in Australia of His Royal Highness.

**TOPIC 3: AUSTRALIAN RESPONSES TO WORLD WAR II**

**KEY KNOWLEDGE**

The responses of the Australian people to the war crisis, including the involvement of both men and women of all ethnic and racial backgrounds in military service, war industries and voluntary work, and the reaction to the presence of large numbers of American troops.

Advice: You are expected to examine the range of ways in which Australian people responded to the crisis of war, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Chinese-Australians and women. Artistic reflections on the presence of US troops can be found in the work of Australian modernists such as Albert Tucker.

Over the course of World War II, nearly one million Australian men served in the armed forces and 66,000 women served in the women's services.

Overall, Australians responded constructively to the crisis, especially during 1942 and 1943. The fact that many countries — including Australia — were under direct threat from expansionist, militaristic regimes (Germany, Japan and Italy) meant that most Australians supported the war effort and made the required sacrifices.

There were, of course, criticisms of some aspects of the war, particularly when it became reasonably clear that the Allies (Britain, the US, France, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, India, the Soviet Union and China) would be victorious.

**DIVERSE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WAR EFFORT**

There is considerable evidence that a range of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds enlisted in the Second Australian Imperial Force (AIF). The AIF Nominal Roll shows that there were soldiers and sailors with German, Italian, Lebanese, Indian, Chinese and Indigenous backgrounds.

Women also played a significant role in the conflict.
REATIONS TO US TROOPS

There was a mixed reaction to the presence of over one-million US troops based in Australia between 1942 and 1945.

Positive Responses
- Government encourages families to welcome Americans into their homes.
- American food such as fried chicken, pumpkin pie and milkshakes becomes more popular in restaurants, cafes and magazines like the Women's Weekly.
- Dance halls and nightclubs are established to entertain American troops.
- Thousands line streets of Melbourne to welcome General MacArthur (March 1942).
- US troops admired for their politeness and skill: "Australians... are among the sailest of American soldiers... When an American gets on a friendly footing with an Australian family, he's usually found in the kitchen, teaching the Mrs. how to make coffee, or washing the dishes." (US Army materials, 1942).
- "The thing that impressed me very much about the Americans was their ability to get things done... I think they showed us up." (Harry Shackleton, 20 years old in 1942).
- During public celebrations to mark American Independence Day (July 1943), a large picture of General MacArthur is hung on facade of Myer in Bourke St.
- 12,000 Australian women marry US troops - most settle in US.
- Most Australians appreciate US efforts in protecting country from Japanese invasion.

Negative Responses
- Some Australian soldiers resent advantages of US troops in regard to uniform, pay rates (almost double Australian rate), popularity with women and glamorous "Hollywood" image.
- Tensions occasionally erupt into violence, such as "battle of Brisbane" riot (1943).
- Some anxiety about soldiers, particularly after "brownout murders" (May 1942) in which Private Eddie Leczkowski strangles three women and is hanged at Pentridge prison (late 1942).

TOPIC 4: THREATS TO SOCIAL COHESION

KEY KNOWLEDGE
The extent to which World War II threatened the cohesion of Australian society, including attitudes to Australian residents of non-British origin, industrial unrest and changes in the role of women.

Advice: You are expected to consider examples of unity and cooperation in Australian society during the war, and decide whether these outweighed the instances of division. Nuanced responses will include both types of examples to a greater or lesser extent, and acknowledge that cohesion varied depending on the period of the war and the groups involved.

Historians generally agree that there was a reasonably high degree of social cohesion and cooperation over the war effort in World War II, especially in comparison with the experience of World War I.

FEBRUARY 1973

Last Australian troops leave Vietnam

UNIT 4 - 4

FEBRUARY 1973

The extent of cohesion

Overall, society was reasonably cohesive, and was not under threat. The government, through propaganda effectively to gather and maintain a sense of national unity. Challenges to cohesion during the war were largely perceived as temporary and did not lead to significant industrial action.

December 1972

Release of all jailed conscientious objectors

1972

End of war

1972

With election of ALP

Innovations

- Overall, community spirit was maintained, but considerable industrial unrest did occur.
- Coal miners and wharfies went on strike in 1944-45.
- Striking Sydney transport and mail services by Labor PM of disloyalty and acting against Australia;
- An ultimatum to the government as though they were as much the enemies of Australia as those who have organised 'war against it' (John Curtin, 1944).

Black Market
- In main years of crisis, black market confined to friendly arrangements between local shopkeepers and loyal customers, e.g. few extra eggs for birthday cake or lamb chops for ailing relative.
- Later in war, people more likely to buy rationed goods on black market.
- "During a week's investigation into Sydney's black markets, I have heard complaints of irregularities in the sale of petrol, tyres, second hand cars, meat, vegetables ... and liquor." (Sydney Morning Herald, July 1944)
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Evidence of Cohesion

- Use of slogans such as 'All In' and 'Equality of Sacrifice' help to inspire confidence in handing of war
- Prime Minister Curtin makes frequent radio addresses to explain the need for regulations and to congratulate people on cooperation
- Sydney Morning Herald warns of impending clothes rationing (May 1943): "The darling needle is a weapon of war these days. Use it on your old clothes. Don't buy new ones."
- Australians respond well to tight restrictions: '[by the winter of 1942, Australians were more severely rationed, regimented and censored than they had been since the early convict days... (and) the vast majority of people accepted these manifold restrictions as necessary.' (Historian Russell Ward)
- Women follow manpower regulations and enter services: 30% of the total workforce in 1943 was female, up from 21% in 1933: "Newspapers, newspapers, radios and magazines... endorsed the connection between war work and patriotism" (Historian Kate Darian-Smith)
- The successful introduction of limited overseas conscription by the Curtin government in 1943 (considering how divisive the issue had been in WWI)
- Political tensions in first year of war diminish after election of Curtin government (October 1943), all-party Advisory War Council operates 1940-45

Evidence of Division

Ethnic Tensions

- Division over non-British residents, especially those from enemy countries; German and Italian residents must report to authorities and travel only with police permission
- 12000 enemy aliens interned (1942), including nearly all Japanese in Australia (about 1100, including 13 year old boy)
- Many Jews escaping Nazism viewed with suspicion

Industrial Unrest

- Overall, unrest lower than in 1930s and late 1900s, but considerable strike action in first and last phases of war
- Coal miners and wharf workers strike in 1940-41; and in 1944-45
- Striking Sydney transport and mining workers accused by Labor PM of disloyalty and aiding enemy: 'This is lawlessness, naked and unashamed... They present an ultimatum to the government as though they were as much the enemies of Australia as those who have organised [against] it' (John Curtin, 1944)

Black Market

- In main years of crisis, black market continued to friendly arrangements between local shopkeepers and loyal customers, e.g. few extra eggs for birthday cake or lamb chops forailing relative
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CHANGES IN THE ROLE OF WOMEN

World War II brought greater change in the roles of women than World War I had. These changes were relatively well accepted, especially in 1942 and 1943, but caused moments of division and tension.

- Initially a traditional role was expected, but by 1942, women could join the auxiliary services in the army, navy and air force. In the same year, the Women’s Land Army was formed, the Manpower Directorate was established to encourage women to enter war work or join the services, and more women started working in munitions, clothing, footwear and aircraft factories, or as meteorologists, tram conductors or bank clerks.
- Over the course of the war, some 250,000 women entered the civilian workforce and over 66,000 entered the women’s services.

These changes to women’s roles challenged the cohesion of society to some degree:

- Some men believed that women were unsuited to work in factories or on farms.
- Some women felt pressure to work in war jobs but still had family responsibilities.
- Most women received just over half the male rate of pay — many resented this.
- Some trade unionists opposed women’s entry into the workforce for fear that they would replace male workers.
- Women working in munitions and other traditionally male occupations were still expected to look feminine, with recruitment posters tending to include smiling women wearing make-up.

At the end of the war, there were some challenges to cohesion over the return of women to the home sphere. Some women could not wait to return to domestic roles, while others resented the fact that they were no longer encouraged to stay in the workforce. The differences depended on age, type of war work, marital status and financial circumstances. Historian Kate Darian-Smith recorded two different kinds of reactions from women at the end of the war: either excitement (“We can get out of those slacks and put on one of those [fashionable] floral cottons with ... frills”) or deep disappointment (“During the war you felt that you were important ... When I ... got into civilian dress I felt that I was bereft.”)

CONCLUSION

World War II challenged the cohesion of Australian society to a minor extent. Overall, the threat to Australia and the nature of leadership ensured widespread public cooperation, especially during the years of acute crisis. Moreover, the fact that the nation had already experienced war and that World War II was widely seen as a ‘just war’ against expansionist militarism meant that a sense of unity and mutual support characterised most of the period 1939–45.