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Chapter 14

Cooktown At War: Saved or sacrificed?

Like the rest of Australia, life in Cooktown was influenced by both World Wars. World War Two had more impact on the town and its economy, as Cooktown was used as a base by units of the Australian and United States armed forces. In particular, as shown in chapter ten, Cooktown aerodrome played a part in the Battle of the Coral Sea. Obviously, the influx of armed forces and construction personnel provided a boost to the commercial sector of the town, especially the hotels and eating establishments. The Council also profited from the increased traffic over the wharves, as most defence supplies were delivered by sea. However, the influx of defence personnel also placed an extra burden on the Council's services, which were already degraded. Despite the obvious advantages of increased commercial trade and wharfage fees, Cooktown gained little from the war compared with Cairns.

World War One.

Although there was no armed forces presence in Cooktown during World War One, the town's economy was nevertheless affected by the conflict. The local economy profited from an increase in the prices of commodities like beef and tin, but suffered from increased prices of manufactured goods. The war also disrupted supplies and shipping, making it more difficult to import and export produce. Like most rural areas, Cooktown also supported fundraising activities significantly, and

provided more army volunteers than the population would suggest.¹²⁰⁹ The town would have suffered financially from the drain of both funds and young fit workers.

As in most small towns, the Council took an active part in defence matters during the First World War. It allowed the Town Clerk to act as an unofficial recruiting agent for the armed forces when the army said that Cooktown was too small for an official recruitment centre. As the war progressed the Clerk arranged for the volunteers to have medical examinations,¹²¹⁰ and also organised transport to Brisbane for those passed fit for duty.¹²¹¹

The effects of a declining population were shown in other areas. When local volunteers were killed and wounded in action, the relevant clergy usually broke the news to the relatives and provided comfort. In Cooktown's case, very few clergy remained in town, and in these cases the Council was expected to act as liaison between the armed forces and the families involved.¹²¹² As well as recruiting the soldiers, it brought the families the sad news when they were hurt or killed. The Council expected no reimbursement for the considerable time and

¹²⁰⁹ For instance, the Roll of Honour for World War One at the Anglican Church lists forty-three names.

¹²¹⁰ Charles Patching, Town Clerk, Town Council of Cooktown, Cooktown, to Captain H.B. Marks, O/C Regimental Depot, Military Department, Townsville, 6 January 1915. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²¹¹ For example, the Council made reservations with the A.U.S.N. Shipping Company for ten men to travel from Cooktown to Brisbane in January 1915. The Company was to debit the costs of travel to the Military. Mayor of Cooktown, to The Managing Agent, A.U.S.N. Company Limited, Cooktown, 6 January 1915. Telegram from Mayor of Cooktown to Captain M.B. Marks, Townsville, 4 January 1915. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²¹² In one instance the army asked the Council to inform Mrs Eleanor Black that her son David Colin Black had been killed in action. Telegram from Lieutenant-Colonel Luscombe, Brisbane, to The Mayor, Cooktown, 4 May 1918. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

expense involved in aiding the war effort, but it undoubtedly constituted a drain of the town's already meagre finances.

Fund raising activities.

During the First World War, Red Cross fundraising activities were carried out by the women of the local Red Cross Branch. By July 1914, they had raised £32/15/9 through direct donations from residents of the district. It is of interest that the Chinese population of Cooktown arranged to make donations to the local Red Cross separate to those of the European population.¹²¹³ This was understandable, given the racial intolerance of the period. The Chinese obviously wished to have their considerable effort recognised. A further £125/3/9 was contributed by the residents of Cooktown and the Annan River tin fields later in the year.¹²¹⁴ While many people offered cash, others chose to make donations of goods to be sold or auctioned to raise funds. The residents of Rossville and the Annan River tin fields even contributed bags of tin.¹²¹⁵ Other unusual donations included two flower bowls from the Wharf Labourers of Cooktown, who stipulated that the bowls were to be raffled by the Rossville Red Cross Society.¹²¹⁶

¹²¹³ The Europeans raised £23/9/3, while the Chinese donated £9/6/6. Red Cross League Sub. List. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. (Given the ratio of Chinese to Europeans, this was a significant achievement for the Cooktown Chinese.)

¹²¹⁴ Charles Patching, Town Clerk, Town Council of Cooktown, to Mrs L.M. Bond, Hon. Secretary, Queensland Branch, Red Cross Society, Ambulance Brigade Building, Brisbane, 22 September 1914. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²¹⁵ For instance two bags of tin were donated by Rossville residents in October 1914. Charles Patching, Town Clerk, Town Council of Cooktown, to Miss Thompson, Hon. Secretary, Rossville Red Cross Society, Rossville, 20 October 1914. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²¹⁶ Charles Patching, Town Clerk, Town Council of Cooktown, to Miss F. Thompson, Secretary, "Rossville Red Cross Society", Rossville, 3 November 1914. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

The Council also organised its own fundraising activities, usually soliciting cash donations and arranging social activities, the results of which were given to the Queensland Patriotic Fund.¹²¹⁷ Although most of the funds came from the immediate area, donations of cash and livestock also came from the rural areas.¹²¹⁸ Support for the Patriotic Fund was not confined to the owners of station properties, however, as station employees also made donations they could afford.¹²¹⁹

Despite being far removed from the actual theatres of war, Cooktown, like other small towns in Australia, was adversely affected by the First World War. The area gave generously to the war effort, in both money and young men. The district could really afford neither, as the money was taken from an already poor community, and many of the young men never returned, placing a further burden on a town already in decline.

World War Two: Cooktown as a defence base.

Cooktown saw the worsening situation in Europe in 1938 as a chance to try for a defence base. In the absence of other stimuli, this would boost the population and bring money into the town. The Minister for Defence was lukewarm, but promised to consider the proposal after he

¹²¹⁷ For instance the Town Clerk reported that one night's entertainment raised £42 for the Patriotic Fund. Charles Patching, Town Clerk, Town Council of Cooktown, to Messrs O'Beirne & Co., Graziers, Laura Station, 15 September 1914. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²¹⁸ *Ibid.* The owners of Laura and Lakefield Stations donated one bullock in 1918. Charles Patching, Town Clerk, Town Council of Cooktown, to His Worship The Mayor And Aldermen Of The Town Council Of Cooktown, 21 February 1918. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²¹⁹ At least two letters acknowledge donations from cattle station workers, about £1 from each contributor each time. The workers at *Yarraden* Station in particular donated to the Patriotic Fund. Charles Patching, Town Clerk, Town Council of Cooktown, to Mr. R.A. Low, Yarraden, 15 September 1914. *Ibid.*, 16 September 1915. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

received a feasibility report from the Military authorities.¹²²⁰ The plan was rejected, as defence experts thought a mobile naval force covering the whole coastline would offer greater protection. They added that even if it became necessary to establish a fixed base in the future, the harbour at Cooktown was not suitable.¹²²¹

The town tried again through a meeting set up to consider the future defence of the area. The meeting was well attended, and passed a number of resolutions concerned with North Queensland's lack of defence preparedness. Those attending favoured compulsory training for home defence, and the provision of anti-aircraft and anti-tank batteries in Cooktown. They also recommended that the R.A.A.F. should send war planes to Cooktown regularly to stimulate the interest of the local youth in the air force. In addition to these requests, the meeting moved that a Rifle Club should again be formed, and asked the Government to supply rifles and ammunition.¹²²²

Despite having the support of the State and Federal Members who represented the district, Cooktown's request for a Militia unit was again refused.¹²²³ The Defence Department said that the 51st Battalion, stationed at Cairns, had reached its increased quota of volunteers, and there were no plans to expand the military resources of the area.

¹²²⁰ H. Glover, Private Secretary, Minister for Defence, Department of Defence, Canberra, to S. Murray, Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 29 June 1938. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²²¹ H.V.C. Thorby, to The Right Hon. W.M. Hughes, K.C., M.P., Minister for External Affairs, Commonwealth Offices, Sydney, 15 July 1938. Secretary, Department of Defence, Melbourne, to S. Murray, Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, Nth. Q'land, 19 July 1938. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²²² Minutes of Public Meeting Held in Council Chambers, 12 January 1939. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. Cooktown had a rifle club between 1889 and 1927.

¹²²³ Letters were written to H.H. Collins M.L.A., W.F.J. Riordan M.P. and H.V.C. Thorby, Minister for Defence seeking support for a Cooktown defence presence.

Similarly, it had no intention of providing anti-aircraft, machine gun or anti-tank batteries at Cooktown. However, it promised that when a squadron of aircraft was stationed at Townsville the Air Force would make regular visits to Cooktown.¹²²⁴

When the local Federal Member, W. Riordan, supported the application he was told that priority would be given to "units whose first function is to deal with raids by landing parties and to act in support of the fixed coast defences". Riordan also supported the establishment of a rifle club at Cooktown, but he was told that there were forty applicants for funding ahead of Cooktown, and only five or six new clubs could be funded each year. Funds were so limited that when a new club was formed, only one rifle could be issued for each five members. However, he was told that clubs could purchase rifles on a Deferred Payment System, at a cost of £4/15/0 each, with a deposit of £1, and annual payments of £1.¹²²⁵

The Government was to learn that although Cooktown people might be disadvantaged, they were persistent. They immediately asked Riordan to support another application for the establishment of a rifle club. The Shire Clerk told him there were "about fifty healthy young Australians here who are anxious to become expert marksmen and be ready to defend their Country when needed".¹²²⁶ Cooktown showed it had political "nouse" by again enlisting the support of the Governor, who

¹²²⁴ G.A. Street, Department of Defence, Canberra, to The Rt. Hon. W.M. Hughes, K.C., M.P., Minister for External Affairs and Attorney General, Commonwealth Offices, Sydney, 29 March 1939. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²²⁵ G.A. Street, Minister for Defence, Department of Defence, Canberra, to W.J.F. Riordan, M.P., Federal Members' Rooms, Commonwealth offices, Brisbane, 16 March 1939. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²²⁶ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to W.J.F. Riordan, M.P., Federal Member's Rooms, Commonwealth Offices, Brisbane, 12 April 1939. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

approached the Military Board in Canberra. This time the answer was more diplomatic. The Governor was told that registration of a new club might be expedited under "Special Circumstances" provisions. The Government had one major problem with making this concession to Cooktown. It was concerned about creating a precedent that would be seized upon by other small towns.¹²²⁷

By the middle of April the Government decided to form a Rifle Club at Cooktown, provided that the members could act as guards for the "vulnerable points" in the area. These included the aerodrome, radio station and lighthouse. The Club was to consist of one officer, one corporal, and twenty-two reservists, and was to be given "Special Guard Status".¹²²⁸ It was designated as *No. 481, Cooktown Rifle Club*, and was to use the old rifle range, which would be upgraded.¹²²⁹ Although the Permissive Occupancy lease on the previous Rifle Range had been cancelled, the Department of Public Lands told the Council it could be reinstated on request.¹²³⁰ Once the Rifle Club was operational, the Council resumed its fight to have a regular military presence in the town, and asked for a military officer to replace the civilian officers in charge of the Rifle Club. It also

¹²²⁷ The Secretary, Military Board, Canberra, to Sir Leslie Orme Wilson, Governor of Queensland, Brisbane, 9 March 1939, B1535 789/1/47, Australian Archives.

¹²²⁸ Director of Rifle Associates and Rifle Clubs, Melbourne, to Headquarters, 1st District Base, Brisbane, 19 April 1939, B1535 789/1/47, Australian Archives. W.J.F. Riordan, Federal Members' Rooms, Commonwealth Offices, Brisbane, to Mr. S. Murray, Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 20 April 1939. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²²⁹ Commandant, 1st District Base, Victoria Barracks, Brisbane, to The Secretary, Military Board, Melbourne, 25 May 1939, B1535 789/1/47, Australian Archives.

¹²³⁰ Secretary, Land Administration Board, Department of Public Lands, Brisbane, to The Clerk, Shire of Cook, Cooktown, 31 May 1939. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

demanded the provision of heavy weapons in the area, and especially at the aerodrome.¹²³¹

World War Two brought a real threat of invasion, but also the promise of more infrastructure and defence spending. For example, in 1940 the Shire Clerk pointed out that Cooktown was the only coastal town without a road connection with the interior, and in the event of an air raid, the people would be at the mercy of the enemy. He asked the Minister for Defence to support the Council's application for £200 to construct an escape road, as without one the town could become "a veritable death trap".¹²³² He failed to mention that Cooktown had a railway, and in the event of an emergency, people could be taken to Laura. He also asked the Minister to establish a Garrison or a Militia in Cooktown to provide protection for the aerodrome and the wireless station. He had formerly held a Commission in the Militia, and offered his services as an instructor.¹²³³ Despite Cooktown's acknowledged vulnerability, both requests were refused. The Queensland Main Roads Commission said the £200 requested for the road would achieve little result, and declined to offer more.¹²³⁴ The Defence Department merely passed the buck, claiming that road construction was a State matter, and outside its jurisdiction. It also rejected the request for an armed presence in the town, saying that while it appreciated Cooktown's

¹²³¹ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to H.H. Collins, M.L.A., Parliament House, Brisbane, 4 September 1939. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²³² J. Gaiter, Secretary, Cooktown Air Raids Precautions Committee, to Hon. G.A. Street, M.H.R., Minister for Defence, Canberra, 22 April 1940. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²³³ *Ibid.*

¹²³⁴ Secretary, Queensland Main Roads Commission, Brisbane, to H.H. Collins, M.L.A., Parliament House, Brisbane, 7 May 1940. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

position, it had no plan to establish a Militia there, or to transfer an existing Garrison.¹²³⁵

The costs of poverty.

The poverty and isolation of the area was revealed in curious ways by the war. A letter received by the Acting Recruiting Officer is indicative of the problems faced:

Re my application for enlistment, 22 May 1940. I havent (sic) disposed of my turnout yet. I've decided not to dispose of my turnout, until I see if I pass the medical office at the central recruiting depot. Would you please advise me as regards what to do. I'm short of funds and will have to get out and earn a few shillings, which will take time. I regret at missing the last down mail with this letter.

Yours faithfully,
Frank Parker
(Nearest postai

address)

Musgrave.

P.S. If I fail to pass at the central recruiting depot, is my fare provided back to where I enlisted from. F.P.¹²³⁶

Presumably the "turnout" referred to in Parker's letter was his horse or horses and equipment. It illustrates the problem faced by residents of remote areas volunteering for armed service in that period. Many relied on their own horses to earn a living. If they disposed of the stock to enlist, and were subsequently rejected as unfit, they would be unlikely to be in a position to purchase more horses, having spent their money on travel and accommodation.

Another case of the war exposing the bare threads of Cooktown's existence was the need for an air raid warning system. Cooktown had a

¹²³⁵ J.T. Fitzgerald, Secretary, Department of the Army, Melbourne, to J.A. Gaiter, Cooktown, 11 May 1940. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²³⁶ Frank Parker, Musgrave, to Mr Geater, Acting Recruiting Officer, Cooktown, 16 August 1940. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

comparatively large area compared to the size of its population, which had dropped to less than 10% of its peak in 1876. The houses were spread over the same area, and this posed problems in providing warning of an impending attack. The only warning devices were the bells of the Catholic and Anglican Churches, with the Catholic bell considered superior. In May 1941, the Sergeant of Police conducted a trial to see how well the Catholic Church bell would work as an air raid warning. It couldn't be heard by enough people, and the Council was told to obtain a more efficient alarm.¹²³⁷ Despite the urgency of the situation, the Council was unable to pay for a siren, and the Department of Home Affairs was asked to supply a siren free of cost.¹²³⁸ As a temporary expedient, the Council mounted a bell in a frame on the back of a truck. In an emergency the truck was to be driven around the town, with a man on the back ringing the bell to warn the population.¹²³⁹ Within two weeks the Council was told that a hand operated siren would be sent forthwith.¹²⁴⁰ Such a quick response was unusual, and one has to wonder if the relevant bureaucrat was swayed by visions of a decrepit truck careering around Cooktown with an agitated Air Raid Warden hanging on the back frantically ringing a church bell mounted on a frame.

Fundraising, W.W. II: an exodus of local funds.

¹²³⁷ C.H. Teichman, Sergeant 2/c., 2409, O/c., Police, Cooktown to The Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 6 May 1941. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²³⁸ Minutes, Coordinating Committee, A.R.P. Cooktown, 22 December 1941. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²³⁹ Secretary to the Coordination Committee, Cooktown, to The Home Department, Brisbane, 23 December 1941. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²⁴⁰ Acting Under Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, Brisbane, to W.H. Ackland, Secretary, Coordination Committee, Cooktown, 31 December 1941. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

Fundraising for the war effort went ahead despite the district's poverty. Quite a lot of money left the district as a result of fundraising for the British Bombing Relief Fund, the Red Cross and the Queensland Patriotic Fund. In September 1940, Cooktown donated £100 to the Bombing Relief Fund to help victims of the aerial attacks on Great Britain, and promised more would follow.¹²⁴¹ The Shire Council also volunteered to establish a Patriotic Fund in Cooktown, raising money to provide comforts for the troops.¹²⁴² The local Fund received a boost when the Governor of Queensland, Sir Leslie Wilson, told Council that he would visit Cooktown, and particularly wished to meet the people involved in fund raising.¹²⁴³ Although no record is available to indicate just how much was raised by the Cooktown branch of the Patriotic Fund, it appears that the area contributed generously to the cause. The Fund raised a total of £577 during the year ended 30 June 1945 alone.¹²⁴⁴ A variety of functions was held to achieve this result, with dances realising a nett profit of £75.¹²⁴⁵ The local people were probably justifiably proud of their effort, but the loss of such a significant amount of money to the district would have affected the town's economy badly.

In 1940, the Federal Government made War Savings Certificates available to raise funds for the prosecution of the war effort. War Loans were already available for the investment of large sums of money, and

¹²⁴¹ Telegram from Sampson, Chairman Cook Shire Council, to Mr. Chandler, Lord Mayor, Brisbane, 24 September 1940. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²⁴² Hugh Gusteen, Secretary, The Patriotic Fund of Queensland, City Hall, Brisbane, to The Shire Clerk, Cooktown Shire Council, Cooktown, 10 January 1940. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²⁴³ Official Secretary, Government House, Brisbane, to The Chairman, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 23 January 1940. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²⁴⁴ Cooktown Patriotic Fund, Statement Of Receipts And Disbursements For The Year Ended The 30th June, 1945. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²⁴⁵ Cooktown Patriotic Fund, Statement Of Functions Held During The Year Showing Total Receipts And Expenses Of Each Function (15 September 1944 to 22 June 1945). Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

the Savings Certificates would allow people with limited means to invest small amounts to help the cause. As local authorities were close to the general population, the Federal Government asked them to form local committees to promote and sell the certificates on its behalf.¹²⁴⁶ The Cook Shire Council saw this as yet another way in which the town could support the war effort, and called a public meeting to promote the Certificates.¹²⁴⁷ Little information is available to indicate how successful the campaign was, but in 1942 the Federal Treasurer again asked the Council to promote the War Loans and War Savings Certificates in the district.¹²⁴⁸

The cost of bureaucracy.

Despite Cooktown's depressed economy, and the additional expenses incurred in preparing for a possible invasion, the Council had to cope with irrelevant requests for information from a variety of Government departments and organisations. Council clerical staff consisted only of the Shire Clerk, and when no qualified Clerk was available, as happened during the war, it had only an inexperienced junior available for clerical duties. Nevertheless, it was expected to answer these requests in detail, despite their lack of relevance to the town. For instance, in 1942 the Clerk of Petty Sessions, who lived in the town and was aware of the Council's position, requested that it supply information on Council owned buildings that could be used to house

¹²⁴⁶ Percy Spender, Federal Treasurer, Commonwealth Treasury, Canberra, to The President, Shire of Cook, Cooktown, 12 April 1940. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²⁴⁷ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Hon. P.C. Spender, M.H.R., Federal Treasurer, Canberra, 10 May 1940. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²⁴⁸ J.B. Chifley, Federal Treasurer, Commonwealth Treasury, Canberra, to The Chairman, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 28 January 1942. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

displaced people in the event of attack. The request listed nineteen items of information to be addressed on each building, including a list of crockery and domestic utensils available, and the composition of the walls, ceiling, floors and roof of each.¹²⁴⁹ The Council replied that it had no buildings suitable for evacuees. The only building owned by the Council, other than the Shire office, was the Daintree Shire Hall, which was in a dilapidated condition and unfit for the purpose.¹²⁵⁰

In another episode in January 1942, the Department of Health and Home Affairs asked the Council to supply monthly details on the Civil Defence Organisation. The Department required complete information on the equipment, stores and personnel connected with Civil Defence in Cooktown. It also required a "concise outline of the scheme of operation of such Organisation in the event of an emergency". Much of the information requested was not relevant to Cooktown's situation, referring to facilities such as electric power, water and sewerage, which, thanks to Government parsimony, the town did not have.¹²⁵¹

Civilian evacuation.

The evacuation of civilians from Cooktown following the Battle of the Coral Sea had a significant impact on the town. This was shown when the Council answered a query from the Department of Health and Home Affairs about emergency exits at the local picture theatre. The Council said that the proprietor threatened to close the facility rather

¹²⁴⁹ Clerk of Petty Sessions, Cooktown, to The Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 22 January 1942. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²⁵⁰ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to The Clerk of Petty Sessions, Cooktown, 24 January 1942. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²⁵¹ Acting Under Secretary, Department of Health and Home Affairs, Brisbane, to The Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 23 January 1942. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

than renovate it to provide more exits. Since the civilian evacuation, the Saturday night audience consisted of only about thirty men, and a few women and children, and the theatre couldn't even recover costs.¹²⁵²

Many of the families who were evacuated never returned after the war, and this accelerated the town's decline.¹²⁵³

Seizure of boats.

Although many Cooktown people had little income, they could usually rely on fish to supplement their diet, and many owned small boats. However, with the threat of invasion in 1941, the Government ordered the seizure of all small boats, which were to be destroyed in the event of invasion. The authorities wanted to prevent the enemy from using the boats, but the move only prevented the locals from eating fish. Controls were so strict that the proprietors of Olivevale Station near Laura needed a permit to purchase a small boat to cross flooded rivers.¹²⁵⁴ Small boats were still under the control of the armed forces in late 1943, despite attempts to release them for local use.¹²⁵⁵

Property damage.

¹²⁵² Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Department of Health and Home Affairs, Brisbane, 19 February 1942. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²⁵³ L. Buhmann, interview.

¹²⁵⁴ Chairman, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to Messrs Porter & Turner, Olivevale Station, Laura, 15 August 1942. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown. The District Naval Officer said that a permit would be issued only when Olivevale had a certificate stating an owner would sell a boat. The owners also had to guarantee that the boat would not be moored within fifty miles of the coast. Lt-Col A.L. Elliott, Prescribed Officer, For District Naval Officer, Queensland, Australian Military Forces, Cairns, to The Chairman, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 18 September 1942. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²⁵⁵ R.O. Wheatley, Commander R.A.N., Naval Staff Office, Townsville, to The Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, 18 November 1943. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

Small North Queensland towns suffered badly from vandalism by armed forces that occupied requisitioned buildings. It represented yet another drain on scarce resources. Defence force personnel were reported in Cooktown for vandalism, and sometimes restitution was made. For instance, P.A. Miller was able to obtain £100 compensation for damage to his property at Rosebank.¹²⁵⁶ However, all too often property owners returned to find damage and dilapidation which they repaired themselves.

Winners and losers.

The experiences of towns occupied by defence forces during the Second World War differed widely. Some, like Cairns, gained considerable benefits. For instance, the port facilities at Cairns were expanded considerably during the war, with extensions to the concrete wharves built by both the Australian and United States forces. Some permanent sealed roads were also constructed, like the concrete sections on Aumuller Street and Sheridan Street. Cairns also benefited from the upgrading of the Kuranda Range road. The armed forces also constructed prefabricated "igloo" buildings that remained after the war. These buildings provided a good start for the industrial centre that later developed in this area.

Despite the influx of service personnel,¹²⁵⁷ Cooktown received little tangible benefit from its wartime experience. As in Cairns, the armed

¹²⁵⁶ Shire Clerk, Cook Shire Council, Cooktown, to P.A. Miller, Boiling Springs, Cooktown, 5 October 1943. Cook Shire Council Archives, Cooktown.

¹²⁵⁷ Sinclair lists three RAAF squadrons operating from Cooktown between 1942 and 1945, as well as No. 27 Operational Base Unit. The Royal Australian Navy had a signals station at Archer Point, and the Australian army was represented by a number of defence, supply and works personnel. The United States had three units present, and their army airforce seven. It is difficult to ascertain how many defence personnel

forces used the wharf facilities, but made no attempt to improve them. They also used the district's few roads, but whereas in Cairns they made some attempt to make improvements, Cooktown's roads were worse after the war than before it started. The hospital fared no better. Although it was taken over during the war, no attempt was made to improve the facilities. Cooktown's only lasting benefit from its occupation was the aerodrome.

Conclusion.

Cooktown showed that although it was a town in decline, it was willing to contribute to the war effort in both World Wars. The Second World War in particular had a profound effect on the town. The local economy was boosted by the influx of a large number of defence personnel. Reminiscences of ex-servicemen stationed at Cooktown indicate that they patronised the hotels and the few eating establishments. However, the evacuation of many civilians left the town with a smaller population than before the war, and this had a detrimental effect after the war. Many of the "wartime refugees" never returned to Cooktown, placing a greater burden on those who remained to fund the town's infrastructure.

Large sums of money were injected into Cooktown during the war. This included at least £70,000 on aerodrome construction, and the significant cost of maintaining a defence base. According to Myrdal's

were in Cooktown at any given time, as they were moved in and out frequently. Sinclair, *Cooktown At War*, pp. 3-4. An indication of the itinerant nature of some personnel is given in the diary of Jack Lawrence, who was sent to Cooktown in September 1942. He was barracked in the Great Northern Hotel for two days, then moved to a camp on the road to Finch's Bay. After twelve days he was sent to a camp at Jansen's Crossing on the Endeavour River, before being sent back to Cairns

theory, the injection of such a large amount of capital should have provided the impetus for a revival. However, the money was directed to war related projects, and the majority of the people employed were outside contractors or service personnel. Consequently, most of the wages and profits did not remain in the town. Cooktown also lost some of its rate paying population during the evacuation, and many of these people never returned, causing a further decline in the area. The hotels and a few other commercial establishments profited from the war, but in general Cooktown was more disadvantaged after the war finished than before it started.