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Townsville and Lavarack Barracks: The Early Years



Prime Minister Harold Holt opens
Lavarack Barracks on 29 July 1966.
(Source: <http://naa12.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp>)

Thesis submitted by
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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Social Science with Honours in History
in the School of Arts & Social Sciences
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Abbreviations

AATTV: Australian Army Training Team Vietnam

ARA: Australian Regular Army

DND: Department of National Development

DRV: Democratic Republic of Vietnam

PM: Prime Minister

RAR: Royal Australian Regiment

RSL: Return Servicemen's Leagues club

RVN: Republic of Vietnam

TCC: Townsville City Council

TDB: Townsville Daily Bulletin

TNQ: Townsville North Queensland

US/USA: United States of America

USSR: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WWII: World War Two

Introduction

This thesis will provide insight into how the locality of Townsville was affected by global conflict in the mid-1960s. It will demonstrate how Australia's defence requirements during this period became linked to the civilian development of northern Australia. This thesis investigates the events associated with the planning, development and opening of Lavarack Barracks in Townsville during its formative years from 1964 to 1966. To provide a better platform for understanding and analysing these events and their consequences, this research is centred on the factors motivating the Government's decision to expand the Army's resources and the decision to locate the base in Townsville. It also examines the events associated with the advanced planning stage of the base project in 1965.

Lavarack Barracks was established in Townsville to satisfy a dual agenda. It was expected both to provide a catalyst to drive civilian development in Townsville and to provide the military with an option to train in varied terrain and offer an enhanced capability for deployment to Southeast Asia and the Pacific region. In 1964 Prime Minister Robert Menzies stated that 'it [a new defence base] was designed to meet Australia's strategic position due to events in Vietnam and Malaysia.'¹ The events associated with the base project from 1964 to 1966 thrust Townsville into the national gaze and exposed the city to global developments. It also brought about a notable development agenda for Townsville and permanently established the city as a central part of Australia's military history and future. An examination of Townsville's military history beginning in November 1964 and culminating with the visit to Townsville of the President of the United States of America, Lyndon Baines Johnson, in October 1966 will be facilitated by an analysis of local print media and other documents. This examination will provide an insight into the events associated with the decision to locate the base in Townsville. It will highlight the resulting negotiations between the Army, local council and State and Federal Governments regarding the base and its subsidiary projects, and will demonstrate the importance of this period to the history of Townsville.

¹ *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, 11 November 1964. p. 1

The role of the military is significant in Australia's history and national status, and global military events have required Townsville to change. Global political developments, international conflict and an increased engagement between Australia, the United States and Asia have arguably increased Federal Government focus on northern Australia. The military's involvement in Townsville has played an undeniably important role in the city's history. The attention from higher levels of government and the influence of global military events on the city has remained a consistent and significant part of contemporary Townsville since the opening of Lavarack Barracks in 1966. The base is now one of the most important military installations in Australia and is a central feature of the city's extensive history of military involvement.

Identified as a regional centre and located in northern Australia, Townsville possesses a military history contributing significantly to the historical fabric of Australia. Some Australian forces involved in the NATO and US led missions in Afghanistan are based in Townsville. Townsville was an exit point for Australian forces involved in World War I. The city was influenced by other major international conflicts including World War II and the Vietnam War. During World War II, the city was the base for tens of thousands of Australian and American defence personnel involved in the early stages of the Allied war against Japan. In 1943 Townsville's civilian population was vastly outnumbered by the 90,000 service personnel based in the area.² It is possible Townsville was an important Allied airbase for operations associated with the Battle of the Coral Sea during the Pacific War.³ This would need further research as there are a number of myths about this battle. The airbase at Garbutt, including the landing strips and the satellite strips close to the Townsville area, became the largest allied airbase in the southern hemisphere during the latter stages of the Pacific War.⁴ The city was also one of very few locations in Australia directly attacked in either World War. The city's role as one of the main staging points in the offensive against Japan was the catalyst for Townsville being attacked by Japanese Kawanishi quad-engine flying boats in 1942.

² Darryl McIntyre. *Townsville at War 1942 – Life in a Garrison City*. (Merino Lithographics, Townsville, 1992) p. 80. This book was produced by the Townsville City Council as part of the national commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea and of Townsville's role in the defence of Australia.

³ Carol Fallows. *WAR – Australian Memories in Black and White*. (Murdoch, Sydney, 2005) p. 68.

⁴ McIntyre. *Townsville at War 1942 – Life in a Garrison City*. p. 32

During the mid-1960s, an escalation in Cold War tensions and the Vietnam War coincided with Townsville becoming the location for one of the Australian Army's largest operational bases. The military base currently known as Lavarack Barracks was opened by Prime Minister Harold Holt in Townsville on 29 July 1966.⁵ The base is still operational. Continued investment in the facility confirms it is an integral part of the strategy and function of the Australian Army. The story behind the establishment of Lavarack is an important part of the history of Townsville and the Australian Army. This study examines that period.

Townsville's growth and development has been influenced by the Army's permanent presence in the city. Over the last four decades the base's continued expansion coupled with the development of Townsville, has justified early opinions that the city would benefit from the military establishment. During the 1960s various public servants, private analysts and the media believed development in Townsville would increase if government led the way. Government could lead by establishing a mechanism to grow public sector employment opportunities. Development of North Queensland including Townsville was considered an 'urgent issue' requiring the attention of the Federal Government. It was generally perceived that a sparsely populated Northern Australia was at risk of being invaded. Populating and developing the North was to offset this risk. . A six point plan formulated by the Brisbane Chamber of Commerce specifically addressing development in North Queensland, contained suggestions to station and train more troops in the North.⁶ During this period, the Federal Government developed ideas about how to expand and develop regional Australia. These ideas and the aim of development were institutionalised in the Department of National Development.

In the 1960s a section within the Federal Government, known as the Northern Division of the Department of National Development, had the task of stimulating development in northern Australia. Local media described the DND as 'showing some interest' in northern development. In 1964 the department commented on

⁵ *TDB*, 29 July 1966. p. 1

⁶ *TDB*, 4 May 1965. p. 1

housing, stating there was an ‘urgent need’ to construct “more homes in North Queensland without delay.”⁷

One way governments sought to facilitate growth was to establish a military base in the area. It was hoped a strong public sector would be established with the introduction of permanent defence force personnel and their associated administrative staff. Evidence of these ideas can be found in local print media articles and will appear throughout the chapters of this thesis. The opening of Lavarack Barracks in Townsville in 1966 came after the local council, the Federal Government and the Army had promoted positive consequential impacts for the small city as a direct result of the Army base. Little or no resistance to the base project was present in the local print media.

From November 1964 until the opening of the base in 1966, the local newspapers eagerly anticipated the consequences of the base. Articles appearing in the local newspaper portrayed the base as intensely beneficial to Townsville. The benefits included a growth in population and employment opportunities and a boost to future economic sustainability in Townsville. The promotion of the base as a driver of economic development, investment and population growth seems strategic. Promoting these consequences assured the base was favourably accepted and integrated into the regional community in its early stages. The base has certainly had an impact on Townsville.

Partly due to the large presence of defence force employees, Townsville has an interesting societal composition including a strong public sector and a diverse private sector. Townsville had already been established as the main regional administrative base for North Queensland for both the Federal and State governments prior to the Lavarack Barracks project. The public sector was strengthened by the establishment of Lavarack in 1966 and has continued to grow with the opportunities created by the expanding Army requirements. In 2001 28.2% of Townsville’s workforce was employed in the Government sector. This is more than 10% higher than the national average, while employment in the private, agricultural and manufacturing sectors was

⁷ *TDB*, 1 December 1964. p. 2

below the national average.⁸ The expanding defence force presence in Townsville has increased the ability for the region to attract private investment and development. This consequence was one of the desired aims for establishing a large military base in Townsville in the 1960s.

It is clear the base project was expected to achieve at least two aims: to provide a substantial capability for the Army and also impact on Townsville's civilian development. While this paper will focus on the stated political and some of the defence objectives, beyond this thesis, some consideration should be applied to the Federal Government's perceived threats to Australia. The Federal Government probably viewed communism as a real threat. A base in the north of Australia may have helped to offset the possibility of Australia falling victim to the 'domino effect', a concept much discussed at the time. Preventing the near neighbourhood becoming a global hotbed of conflict may have also contributed to momentum to establish the northern base. These factors are relevant considering the base could have been located in southern Australia.

The base could have been located in Victoria and not Townsville. Military officers had advised the Government in 1964 that a new base would best serve the Army if it were built in Victoria. However, certain domestic and international circumstances appear to have contributed to the Government's decision to overrule military advice and locate the base in Townsville.

High expectations were aired considering the short-term goals associated with the size and structure of the defence force planned for Townsville. An ambitious timeframe was established early in the project. Many of the early aims were not achieved in the first few years of the base's development, construction and operation. The rapid processes associated with the initial planning stages of the base project created an environment that fostered many difficulties. Contentious issues began to emerge once the project had reached an advanced planning stage in 1965.

⁸ Peter Wilson (eds). *The Australian Political Almanac*. (Hardie Grant Books, Sydney, 2001) p. 185

The Minister for the Army, Dr AJ Forbes, revealed in early 1965 that the Army planned to have 4000 troops stationed in Townsville by 1968.⁹ This goal was not achieved. Analysis of the events of 1965 and of the correspondence between governments and departments during this year, demonstrates how the base project was hindered by various difficulties and disagreements between key parties. Letters sent between the Mayor of Townsville, the Army, the Premier of Queensland and the Prime Minister show that there were many issues requiring negotiation regarding land approvals, funding and infrastructure.

The reasons behind the failure to fulfil the initial predictions and expectations may have been a combination of two key factors. The lengthy negotiations between government institutions and the eventual deployment, and then increased commitment of Australian combat troops to Vietnam. It is clear the agenda of northern development played a role in Townsville becoming the location for a defence establishment, but the decision to build the base in Townsville was also influenced by strategic security and foreign policy considerations.

A desire to promote rapid civilian development in the north sparked haste in the base project. Urgency also came about due to the increasing demands placed on the Army. These demands emanated from the growing conflicts in Southeast Asia and the Australian Government's foreign policy. Evidence to support this assumption can be linked to a 1964 government review of Australia's defence and security arrangements. The announcement that Townsville was likely to become the location for a military base was made shortly after the conclusion of a defence and security review conducted toward the end of 1964. Based on analysis gleaned from the documents used in this paper, it is clear the Army and the Federal Government sought prompt cooperation from local authorities in order to achieve rapid results in the base project. In 1964 AJ Forbes stated: 'the decision [to base troops in Townsville] had to be made quickly as there is an urgent need to establish buildings and services to house the units.'¹⁰

⁹ *TDB*, 28 April 1965. p. 1

¹⁰ *TDB*, 27 November 1964. p. 1

It is apparent the Federal Government's perspective on political developments occurring in Southeast Asia contributed to Townsville becoming the location for a large defence installation. It is my view that although Australia had not yet contributed combat forces to Vietnam in 1964, issues such as future commitment, a National Service scheme and further resource requirements enforced on the Army as a result of this, may have increased the desire for speed in the project.

The establishment of the Army base in Townsville in 1966 is related to international political and military situations, particularly the scenarios related to the Cold War. The mid 1960s confrontation between Malaysia and Indonesia concerned the Australian Government. It eventually attracted the commitment of Australian forces in Malaysia. Further developments in the Vietnamese conflict and a deepening of the United States' combat involvement in Vietnam, drew further Government attention toward Southeast Asia. The Cold War had expanded into the areas lying directly north of Australia. The necessity for Australian forces to gain access to adequate training areas similar to the terrain in Southeast Asia became a priority. Similarly it became obvious Australian forces should be based and trained in locations closer to their potential deployment areas.

The geographic location of northern Australia in relation to Southeast Asia and the proximity of Townsville to jungle training areas contributed to the city becoming the location for an Army base. In a sense, the establishment of the base contributed to the city's increasing exposure to international political developments and subsequent Federal Government policies. This is evident as the city's community is directly affected when overseas deployment requires the services of Townsville-based troops. Families, dependents and friends of deployed personnel are affected as is the economy of Townsville.

However, the initial consequences took time to materialise and did not provide an immediate impact on the city as had been predicted in local media. The fiscal and social implications for the city occurred at a slower rate than was originally envisaged. While external political developments such as the Vietnam War contributed to Townsville becoming the location for an Army base, other external factors and the overseas deployment of Australian forces to Vietnam, combined with

the difficulties in negotiating the terms of the base's development, probably delayed the early operation of the base.

Despite the minimal immediate impact, the base increased employment in the areas of public administration and defence and contributed to population growth in Townsville. An economic structure study done in Townsville in the early 1970s linked public sector initiatives with future private sector development. The study detailed the importance of public sector activity in areas such as the 'provision of land', 'provision of housing' and 'provision of community services'. Housing was considered the 'most important' as it would satisfy the expansion of defence forces and the transfer of government personnel expected to occur in the city.¹¹ The re-introduction of large numbers of defence personnel to Townsville after the establishment of Lavarack ensured the city continued to contribute to Australia's military history.

In summary, as with other cities around the world, global phenomena such as the World Wars, the Cold War and international politics significantly influenced Townsville. The decision to build Lavarack Barracks in Townsville during the escalating war in Vietnam exemplifies this fact. The correspondence between key parties involved in the events of this period display how the base project presented an enormous and complex set of tasks for government. An investigation of Townsville's local media provides an interesting catalogue of events related to the Army base during this period. It reinforces the idea that the base was located in Townsville in order to satisfy two purposes – to act as a attractor of civilian development, and to fulfil a strategic military objective. The establishment of Lavarack Barracks at Townsville emphasizes how international political and military considerations can have major impacts at the local level.

This thesis will utilise a range of primary and secondary sources and is centred on information extracted from articles published in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* from 1964 to 1966. These articles were accessed through the library at James Cook

¹¹ P Shrapnel. *Townsville Economic Structure Study*. Cities Commission, Coordinator General's Department, Department of Commercial & Industrial Development, City of Townsville, City of Thuringowa, (Study conducted by: Philip Shrapnel & Co. PTY. LTD., Business Forecasts – Economic & Market Research, December 1974) pp. 115-116

University in Townsville. An Army journal article by Edgar Logan is used and other sources include letters sent between the Mayor of Townsville, the Premier of Queensland, the Prime Minister of Australia and various government and Army officials. An unpublished document, which does not have an author listed, is also used. These sources originated from a collection of military documents held at Lavarack Barracks.

Some of the secondary sources include an analysis of Cold War history by John Gaddis, a history of Australia by Geoffrey Bolton, details of Australian Defence Force statistics by Joan Beaumont et al, and Australian general military and Vietnam history by Ian McNeill, Peter Pierce, Jeffrey Grey and Jeff Doyle. None of these sources discuss the impact of Lavarack Barracks on Townsville, but they have been chosen to add context and depth to the primary sources used.

The first chapter will detail the international context associated with the Australian Government's foreign policy and how it affected the deployment of defence personnel. The international political environment and the expanding requirements of the Australian military resulted in the decision to construct a new base for the Army. Chapter two will examine why Townsville was chosen as the location for the Army's new base. Chapter three will analyse some of the negotiations, which occurred in 1965, between the three tiers of government and the Army regarding the advanced planning for the base. The planning phase was underpinned by Australia's deepening involvement in the Vietnam War and the developing confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia. The final chapter covers the opening of the Army base in Townsville and the visit to the city of the US President, LB Johnson, in October 1966.

Chapter One

The International Context

An analysis of Townsville's print media and other documents will provide insight into how a development agenda and foreign policy provided the motives to locate a significant defence base in Townsville during the 1960s. Townsville's local print media contains an overview of events related to the development of the base project. It also includes details that provide evidence of the motives behind the decision to build the base in Townsville. An investigation of Townsville's print media shows how suddenly the base project emerged and how locals seemed unaware of the plans until they were announced. The analysis of print media and other sources supports the interpretation that global political and military developments significantly influenced Townsville in the mid-1960s. These events dictated Australia's foreign policy and influenced defence planning, which resulted in a large defence base being built in Townsville.

During the 1960s a general desire existed within the Federal Government to expand development in Northern Australia. The establishment of the Northern Division of the Department of National Development is evidence of this. The national goal of commercially developing the North and increasing the involvement of industry was shared by various institutions. Evidence can be found in the local print media's representations of comments made by councillors and numerous local editorials. In 1965 the Brisbane Chamber of Commerce identified the development of North Queensland as an issue of high priority.¹² In order to achieve expansion and attract development, it was perceived by various institutions that a community such as Townsville required a growth in population.

The idea that Townsville required a rapid increase in population in order to propel and sustain developmental growth was a common theme in the media representations about northern development. It was believed that a rapid and sustainable increase in the population of Townsville could be achieved by locating a major military base in

¹² *TDB*, 4 May 1965. p.1

the city. It appears this idea was first touted in 1964 by the director of the Northern Division of the DND, Dr RA Patterson, who stated that a defence base would have a 'tremendous impact' on northern development and boost settlement of the area.¹³ While it is notable that the development agenda did contribute to the decision to locate a military base in Townsville, in the first instance we must investigate the motives and supposed necessities governing the general decision to build a military base.

In November 1964 Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies announced in the House of Representatives that due to the expansion of the Army resulting from National Service, a new task force group would be raised and ultimately located in Townsville.¹⁴ The consequences of the Government's National Service scheme required the expansion of the Army's existing infrastructure. The implementation of National Service was necessitated by the Government's assessment that it required a greater military capability than it already possessed. Central to this assessment was the political and military developments occurring outside Australia. The extent of influence exerted on Australia by the United States is likely to have been significant. Since the conclusion of WWII Australia had become more closely aligned with US interests. Beginning in the late 1940s the US became invested in conflicts associated with their rival superpower, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. By the time of the Vietnam War and the establishment of Lavarack Barracks the conflict between the USA and USSR was entrenched globally. The political instability and military tensions around the globe and particularly in Southeast Asia during the 1960s were significant.

The increasing military operations in Vietnam and the intensification of the conflict between Indonesia and Malaysia drew the attention of the Australian Government.¹⁵ Australia's geographic region was experiencing political upheaval which resulted in conflict and eventual war. The political problems within Australia's region often

¹³ *TDB*, 19 October 1964. p.2

¹⁴ The Lavarack Barracks Project: Townsville, Queensland, The First Phase. 2RAR Museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville. p. 1. This source appears to have been written in 1966. This source is not published and does not include the author's name.

¹⁵ Ian McNeill. 'The Australian Army and the Vietnam War', in *Vietnam Days: Australia and the impact of Vietnam*. Peter Pierce, Jeffrey Grey, Jeff Doyle (eds), (Penguin Books Australia, Ringwood, 1991) p. 11

included military action and were deeply entangled in the global struggle known as the Cold War.

Originally concentrated in the northern hemisphere, the Cold War essentially expanded its theatre into Southeast Asia from as early as the 1950s. The plight of Indochina drew the attention of Moscow, Beijing and Washington and the parameters for further conflict were immediately established. Moscow was specifically interested in expanding communism. Washington was concerned about the threat of expanding communism and the much discussed “domino effect” influenced American foreign policy. This held significant implications for Australia’s defence arrangements and resulted in Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War during the 1960s and 1970s. The sequence of events associated with Indochina in the 1950s directly contributed to policies such as the National Service scheme and the expansion of the Australian Army’s infrastructure in the 1960s.

As a result of Australia’s National Service scheme, which was introduced in 1964 and continued until 1972, and the eventual commitment of combat forces to Vietnam, Australian troop numbers steadily increased and peaked at 44, 533 in 1970.¹⁶ The enormous increase in troop numbers and their deployment to Vietnam is an indication of the extent to which the Federal Government believed Australia held stakes in the Cold War scenario. Therefore it is certain the Government’s foreign and defence policies of this era were greatly influenced by the global struggle and in particular, US interests. While Australia had not yet committed combat forces to Vietnam when Townsville was first named as the location for a military base, the Government and the Army were well aware of the potential for intensification in the conflict and a subsequent increase in the demands placed on the military.

Evidence of their probable knowledge of the potential for combat deployment is confirmed in the meeting of government officials in 1964. In December of that year, the Australian ambassador in Washington, JK Waller, was told by the US Assistant Secretary of State, William Bundy, that the situation in Vietnam was fragile. Bundy outlined American plans for increasing the pressure on Communist North Vietnam

¹⁶ Joan Beaumont et al. *Australian Defence: Sources and Statistics*. (The Australian Centenary History of Defence – Volume VI), (Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2001) p. 124

and detailed the intention to deploy troops, adding that Australia could reinforce the American deployment with whatever troops Australia and New Zealand could provide.¹⁷ Australia's long standing advisory role in Vietnam suggests that it considered the option for future combat deployment in Vietnam. Australian officials were probably concerned with pleasing their American colleagues, who were likely to take a favourable view of support and commitment of troops from Australia.

Australia became involved in Vietnam when twenty-nine Australian personnel were flown to Vietnam to form part of an Australian Army Training Team Vietnam in 1962.¹⁸ The team members were experts in jungle warfare with many possessing Malaysian experience.¹⁹ The implications of Australia's initial deployment were clear. It was aimed at helping the southern based Republic of Vietnam (RVN) overcome its rival, the communist Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), which controlled the northern part of Vietnam. Australia's alliance with the US on Vietnam indicates its willingness to become part of the global struggle resonating out of northern hemisphere rivalry between the US and the USSR. The influence of Cold War politics on local and regional developments was significant. Gaddis indicates that where the opportunity to define local and regional developments through Cold War scenarios arose, it was usually taken.²⁰ The chance for Cold War opportunism certainly arose in Vietnam. Vietnam also provided Australia with an opportunity to crystallise its alignment with US foreign policy objectives.

The ideological and political divisions were drawn early by key players in their assessment of Vietnam. Both the DRV and the RVN received extensive aid from their allies, with the DRV receiving economic assistance from the USSR, China and Eastern Europe and the RVN being helped by the USA and Australia.²¹ China and the USSR had both formally recognised the government of the DRV in 1950.²² China, which believed events in Indochina had worldwide significance, decided to provide

¹⁷ McNeill. 'The Australian and the Vietnam War'. pp. 21-22

¹⁸ John Rowe. *Vietnam: The Australian Experience*. (Time-Life Books, Australia, Pty Ltd, North Sydney, 1987) p. 6

¹⁹ McNeill. 'The Australian Army and the Vietnam War'. p. 19

²⁰ John Lewis Gaddis. *We Now Know: rethinking Cold War History*. (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1997) p. 156

²¹ McNeill. 'The Australian Army and the Vietnam War'. p. 14

²² Gaddis. *We Now Know: rethinking Cold War History*. p. 159

military assistance to the nationalist Viet Minh just as the US had decided to supply the colonial French in 1950.²³ While the US generally promoted anti-colonial policies and encouraged nationalist independence, it would only support anti-communist nationalist movements due to its concern for Soviet expansionism. It seems, without intervening itself, Washington feared that colonial empires could be supplanted by philosophical and political organisations emanating from and controlled by the Kremlin.²⁴

Foreign policy perceptions and alliances resulted in the service of Australian troops in Malaysia and motivated the eventual deployment of combat troops to Vietnam in 1965. In 1964 the war in Vietnam was developing but it was deeply entangled in Cold War strategy as was Indonesia's confrontation with the newly federated states of Malaysia. The instability and conflict within the region and the Cold War scenario contributed to the Government's perception that Australia should play an active role within the region by supporting US initiatives. Supporting the US must have seemed a natural progression after Australia had spent most of its earlier years supporting the interests of Great Britain. Perhaps Australia felt that it needed to contribute militarily to US objectives in Southeast Asia after the US's involvement in deterring Japanese forces from attacking Australia en masse during WWII. To contribute militarily the Australian Government required an expanded and capable defence force. It appears the Federal Government implemented a National Service program as a contingency so that the defence force would be able to cope with the demands that might arise from further deployment. The inclusion of Townsville in the defence planning of this era relates to Australia's foreign policy which was developed in the light of actions occurring in the conflict between Indonesia and Malaysia and the festering war in Vietnam.

During this period Australia's foreign policy influenced defence requirements, had an impact on budgetary considerations and inspired a defence review that significantly contributed to Townsville becoming a permanent garrison city. The 1964 review of Australia's defence capabilities was the catalyst in the Townsville base project. A direct link between the conclusions of the defence review and the decision to locate a

²³ Ibid. p. 161

²⁴ Gaddis. *We Now Know: rethinking Cold War History*. p. 156

significant defence base in Townsville can be found in a letter written by the Prime Minister of Australia to the Premier of Queensland on 9 December 1964. In the letter the Prime Minister wrote that within his announcement regarding the defence review, he had previously stated that it was decided to establish a new battle group ‘probably in the Townsville area.’²⁵ The letter can be interpreted as evidence which supports the link between the events in Vietnam and Townsville’s base project. In the interpretation of McNeill et al, the Commonwealth Government’s strategic and security assessment of Southeast Asia provided the motive to conduct the wide-ranging defence review.²⁶ The Government’s desire to enhance its military capabilities inspired the 1964 review of Australia’s defence and security structure. The defence review was triggered by the necessity to develop relevant foreign policy based on the Australian military’s capability and structure.

Clearly, the comprehensive review was conducted in order to form the basis for various defence policies that would facilitate actions dealing with the Southeast Asia conflicts. High ranking defence and government officials worked on reviewing the capabilities and materials of Australia’s defence forces. It was reported in Townsville that top defence officials worked 60-70 hours per week for three months on the defence review.²⁷ The wide-ranging defence review was concluded in October 1964.

Upon its completion the review was sent to Cabinet for consideration. At the beginning of November 1964, Cabinet began its assessment process.²⁸ Townsville’s local print media reported that Cabinet intended to discuss a three year plan to improve the striking and mobility power of all three defence services.²⁹ The media reports also speculated that Cabinet would consider the possibility of contributing military aid to Malaysia and South Vietnam.³⁰ Media reports suggested that most projections adhered to by the Government indicated an environment requiring the expansion of Australian military operations and deployments. The potential for expanded deployments and the climate of reflection and analysis brought about by the

²⁵ Prime Minister of Australia, RG Menzies, to Premier of Queensland, GFR Nicklin, 9 December 1964. Copy held by 2RAR museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville.

²⁶ McNeill. ‘The Australian Army and the Vietnam War’. p. 11

²⁷ *TDB*, 6 November 1964. p. 1

²⁸ *TDB*, 5 November 1964. p.1

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

defence review resulted in the media focusing attention on troop numbers within the Australian forces.

Townsville's print media alluded to a shortfall in Australian troop numbers. Media reports suggested that the review would focus on troop numbers as a matter of urgency. It was reported that the defence review also covered issues concerned with improving Army recruiting.³¹ An urgency to complete the defence review was compounded by a concern about the military's ability to respond appropriately to expanding deployments in Southeast Asia. There is evidence of a general perception that the size of the Australian Regular Army was inadequate. The ARA numbered around 23,000 toward the end of 1964.³²

As a result of the conclusion by the Government and Defence Department that Australia had a shortfall in troop numbers policies were enacted to rectify this situation, which led to a doubling of troop numbers within Australia's defence force from 1964 to 1970. The goal of increasing troop numbers by invigorating recruitment drives and the National Service scheme may have provided further impetus to plans to construct a military base. Part of the purpose of establishing the new base was to enable the Army to adequately house the extra troops it had planned to receive from a revitalised recruitment drive and an introduction of balloted conscription.

Although it seemed an expansion of the military would result from the discussions held by Cabinet, prior to the formal announcement the local media did not mention that Townsville would be considered as a location for a new base. It is evident that some of the policy formulated from the material of the defence review had implications for Townsville, but there is no evidence to suggest the base project at Townsville was anticipated locally, which confirms the sudden nature of the base project particularly in the perception of locals.

In early November 1964 local residents seemed unaware the Commonwealth Government's defence review would have significant short and long term implications for Townsville. The local newspaper did not print stories suggesting

³¹ Ibid.

³² Beaumont et al. *Australian Defence: Sources and Statistics*. p. 124

Townsville could be included in military policy formulated as a result of the defence review in November 1964. An article discussing a development symposium in Townsville addressing issues such as town planning did mention large projects including the construction of the university campus at Douglas, but did not mention a major military project.³³ The article appeared on the same day that the Chief of General Staff, Sir John Wilton, directed Northern Command to make a preliminary reconnaissance of the Townsville area.³⁴

Despite the publicity surrounding the review, the focus of the print media at the time was on the recent centenary of Townsville. The role of war, conflict and military operations in Townsville's history was central to the centenary celebrations. Articles were printed about previous global conflicts and military operations involving Townsville. As part of the centenary celebrations, the local paper carried a supplement emphasising the 'vital part' played by Townsville in the Pacific war in the early 1940s.³⁵ It did not mention the possibility of the government and defence department locating a permanent military base in Townsville in the future. This is surprising considering the recent publication of Dr RA Patterson's comments linking development in Townsville to the establishment of a permanent defence base.³⁶ His comments had appeared in the media only a few weeks before the centenary celebrations, which coincided with the conclusion of the defence review. While the local print media did not speculate about the future link between defence and Townsville, they were obviously aware of the significance of the defence review. This is highlighted by the media's coverage of the defence review and their coverage of the conflicts that were the obvious catalyst for the review.

After days of consideration by Cabinet the initial conclusions made from the defence review were slowly released. Articles appeared in Townsville's print media claiming northern Queensland might be included in defence planning. The link between the foreign policy perceptions, objectives and defence planning became clear when the Prime Minister related the domestic defence plans to foreign policy perspectives

³³ *TDB*, 6 November 1964, p. 11

³⁴ *The Lavarack Barracks Project – Townsville Queensland The First Phase*. [c.1966], 2RAR Museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville. p. 1

³⁵ *TDB*, 2 November 1964, p. 10

³⁶ *TDB*, 19 October 1964, p.2

based on events in Southeast Asia. Townsville's local media printed a front page report headed 'Major Military Base for North Likely', which described northern Queensland as a possible location for a new military base.³⁷ Forty eight hours later the Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, was reported to have said that the three year military plan developed by Cabinet 'was designed to meet Australia's strategic position due to events in Vietnam and Malaysia'.³⁸ The Prime Minister's statement directly links the events in Southeast Asia and the policies developed as a result of the defence review. The security threat posed by the escalating conflict in Vietnam and other events in Southeast Asia did contribute to the reasoning behind the decision to construct a new military base for the Australian Army.

³⁷ *TDB*, 9 November 1964. p. 1

³⁸ *TDB*, 11 November 1964. p. 1

Chapter Two

Why Townsville?

It has been demonstrated that the Government's motivation to build a military base was generated by policy developed out of the 1964 defence review. The previous chapter explained that the review was inspired by the defence requirements of Australia's political attitude and assessment of ongoing conflicts in Southeast Asia. This reveals the reasons behind the Government's decision to build a military base, but it is difficult to ascertain why Townsville was chosen as the location for the base. There is evidence suggesting an agenda involving northern development contributed to Townsville becoming the location for the base. In one interpretation the decision to locate the base in Townsville may have overruled the preference of some Army officials who allegedly recommended the base be built in Victoria. Along with the civilian development agenda, other variables certainly appear to have contributed to the decision. These include the existence of desirable training terrain in North Queensland and Townsville's close proximity to the main areas involving the deployment of Australian troops. This chapter will examine the period after the decision was made to build a military base and focus on Townsville's print media reportage of this period. It will then offer perspectives on why Townsville was chosen as the location for Australia's newest defence base.

In early November 1964 it was decided by Government that a new defence base was going to be built for the Army. After the Prime Minister indicated that northern Australia was being considered as the location for the base, an Army official immediately scouted potential locations within Townsville.³⁹ Some weeks after this a reconnaissance party of senior Army officers from Brisbane and Canberra visited Townsville to search for a site for a military base.⁴⁰ The senior officials' visit occurred after a Townsville based Army official had identified three potential locations following a 'detailed examination of possible barrack and training areas'.⁴¹

³⁹ Council Letter, Mayor of Townsville, A Smith, to Prime Minister of Australia, Sir Robert Menzies, 27 November 1964, copy held by 2RAR museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville.

⁴⁰ *TDB*, 25 November 1964. p. 1

⁴¹ Council Letter, Smith to Menzies, 27 November 1964.

The three areas were inspected and endorsed by the Mayor of Townsville, A Smith, who stated that he was ‘pleased to confirm that the areas... were quite suitable for the siting [sic] of a new battle group at Townsville.’⁴²

At the time the council appears to have been hopeful that the city would be confirmed as the location for the base, and it appears that they had endorsed this prospect without consulting the general public.

In its initial stages the idea of locating the base in Townsville did not ignite a significant process of debate, analysis or widespread public consultation. Army officials undertook reconnaissance exercises in Townsville shortly after the conclusion of the 1964 defence review. This was done with the goal of determining the exact location of the base and not to determine public opinion on the base project, although, it must be noted that the Minister for the Army did address the public via a television appearance.⁴³ Despite the television appearance, it seems that the decision to locate the base in the north was made without a comprehensive feasibility study.

As well as a lack of a well-publicised feasibility study, the base project in Townsville quickly gathered momentum without a significant period of community consultation or planning between the three tiers of government. It will be demonstrated later in this thesis that the lack of initial planning by governments compounded difficulties that arose later in the project.

Despite the lack of community consultation, a feasibility study or comprehensive government planning, Townsville rapidly became the firm favourite for the location of the base. The emerging defence requirements of Australia’s foreign policy combined with the local government’s eagerness to embrace the base proposal, contributed to the rapid confirmation of Townsville as the site for the new Army base. Although these links appear relatively obvious now, it is not clear to what extent these variables explain how Townsville was chosen in the first place. Perhaps it was perceived that deciding to locate the base in Townsville would receive less opposition than had officials chosen another city.

⁴² Council Letter, Smith to Menzies, 27 November 1964.

⁴³ *TDB*, 27 November 1964. p. 1

The sudden and unexpected interest in Townsville can be linked to exterior events and politically driven objectives. The speed of the process did not allow a climate of disapproval to develop. Despite the possibility for political debate surrounding the decision to build a military base, local government and other officials seemed to be delighted with the prospect of Townsville becoming a military city. In the early stages the council and significant community groups did not object to the base proposal. It seems there was no platform of political dissent related to Australia's foreign policy or defence plans. The local newspaper seems to indicate public support and does not display any evidence of widespread or organised disapproval to the base project. It is evident the base project presented difficult issues for governments and Army planners in 1965 and 1966, but in late 1964 local print media reports clearly indicate a favourable response from local authorities and media.

On 12 November 1964 local print media reported the regional city of Townsville was in a good position to be named by authorities as the location for the proposed military base. The article stated that Townsville was 'almost certain to win recommendation as the best place for a multi-million pound battle group that would ultimately house 10,000 soldiers and their families'.⁴⁴ Sellheim (73 miles [around 117 kilometres] south-west of Townsville) was ruled out of contention, but three sites in Townsville, including the one eventually chosen on the foothills of Mount Stuart, were detailed in the same report.

The editorial on 12 November addressed the prospect of increased defence spending, carefully asserting that as long as money was spent wisely it would be acceptable to Australians. It discussed the potential for increased defence spending to impact on taxes and stifle other developments, but asserted those outcomes were preferable to being unable to defend in the face of an aggressor.⁴⁵ It seems that the memory of events relating to the Pacific theatre of WWII were alive in the minds of locals. The real threat posed by Japan during this conflict provided context and motive for North Queenslanders to embrace the strengthening of defence assets in the north. During

⁴⁴ *TDB*, 12 November 1964. p. 1

⁴⁵ *TDB*, 12 November 1964, Editorial. p.2

1965 the editorial reinforced this position stating that ‘to try to evade it [increased defence spending] would be stupidity and recklessness of the highest order’.⁴⁶

Enthusiasm for defence projects in the north were well received partly because of the lived memories of WWII and the current threat scenario relating to the Cold War... A local editorial encouraged the increased emphasis on defence initiatives, while a local RSL representative referred to the security threat faced by Australia. Mr AJ Sherriff, a senior North Queensland RSL official, stated the position of the RSL was one that welcomed the expansion of the Army anywhere in the north due to threats believed to be brewing within the region.⁴⁷ The local newspaper editor’s support was expressed in an article stating that the conditions faced in Australia’s northern strategic environment were similar to those experienced when Japan was a threat during its imperial expansion in the 1930s and early 1940s. The editor affirmed his position by writing that the decision to base troops in the area ‘is a wise one’ and that ‘the sooner the plans... are implemented the better’.⁴⁸

Finally, in late November 1964 major Army talks were conducted within the Townsville area, with a mission to conclude initial proceedings such as site selection and progression to the next stage. An article headed ‘Army Talks Tomorrow’ contained details of three senior officials visiting Townsville for talks which addressed the possibility of assigning Townsville as the location for a new defence installation.⁴⁹ The touring party of senior Army officers involved in the reconnaissance of Townsville in late November 1964 were reported to have met with local leaders. The party included the Minister for the Army, Dr AJ Forbes, the Chief of General Staff, Lieutenant Sir John Wilton, and the Army Department Secretary, Mr Bruce White. Attendance of such high-level officials indicates the importance placed by the Commonwealth government on articulating and formalising any announcement that may have been required during the visit. Details of this meeting were undisclosed in media reports, but it would seem council representatives positively accepted the Army’s proposals. The editor of the local paper certainly welcomed the Federal Government’s new policies and the defence proposals.

⁴⁶ *TDB*, 29 June 1965, Editorial p.2

⁴⁷ *TDB*, 10 November 1964. p. 3

⁴⁸ *TDB*, 12 November 1964, Editorial p.2

⁴⁹ *TDB*, 25 November 1964. p. 1

The day following the discussions there was an announcement that Dr Forbes would speak to the electors of Herbert on local television. This was advertised using print media by the local Liberal member for Herbert and carried the message ‘don’t miss this important address’.⁵⁰ On the night of 26 November 1964 the Minister for the Army specifically addressed Townsville locals through TNQ Channel Seven, confirming Townsville would be the location for a new military base.⁵¹

On 27 November the local paper ran the front page headline ‘Townsville Confirmed for Battle Group Site’, which contained details of the project. These were based on the announcements made by Dr Forbes during the television address the previous night. Details included where the military installation would be constructed, which would be close to Townsville’s city area so Army personnel could enjoy the benefits of the city.⁵² The article indicated that the base would cost at least £5,000,000 and was expected to house thousands of troops, requiring the further construction of ‘approximately 750 houses’ for families of defence personnel.⁵³ Dr Forbes is also quoted as saying ‘Townsville would become a major defence establishment’.⁵⁴

The news that Townsville would become the site for the northern military base was well received in the local paper. The initial statements made by Dr Forbes regarding the base proposal for Townsville were represented in the local media by positive, but calculated commentary. An editorial cautiously suggested the resulting extra population due to the Army base would be easily absorbed into the province, providing merchants, wholesalers, retailers, government departments (at all levels), rail services and post offices adjusted to cope with the increased activity.⁵⁵ The article described the necessity for intense cooperation between local, state and federal governments. The TCC was warned that it would have a heavier workload with the responsibility of having to provide extra roads, water supplies and sanitary services.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ *TDB*, 26 November 1964. p. 20

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *TDB*, 27 November 1964. p. 1

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *TDB*, 28 November 1964, Editorial. p. 2

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

The editorial concluded by relating the proposed construction of barracks at Townsville to the external environment of Australia, in that ‘the situation overseas’ confirmed the importance the military deployment to Townsville would have in protecting Australia.⁵⁷ Anecdotal evidence suggests that northern Australia’s experiences in WWII provided real substance to the perception that Australia required protection from northern threats.

This perception had a number of effects. It made the close relationship and alignment with US interests seem logical. Strong diplomatic and military ties with the US provided a potential deterrent to threats. The US was probably viewed as being capable of assisting Australia if it were attacked. Australia’s contribution to military operations in Vietnam was in a sense legitimised by the northern threat perception. Based on the events in Southeast Asia and the fact Australia was considering the prospect of increasing its existing deployment of troops to the region, the decision to locate the base in northern Australia was logistically sound.

In 1966 the Australian Prime Minister, Mr HE Holt, identified the proximity of Townsville to the ‘danger areas’ of the north as a factor directing the establishment of a defence base in the city.⁵⁸ It meant the Army would possess a significant base that was closer to the action than the bases already established in Australia. Townsville was an established city possessing a capable port and already boasted an air force base. The city was located in a region blessed with various terrains deemed to be valuable for training exercises. The city is close to jungle terrains that have the capacity to provide training areas that are not too dissimilar to the conditions and environment in the Southeast Asia region. At the time of the development of the base project, authorities saw these characteristics as strategically beneficial. However, it seems these factors were not dominant in the decision to locate the base in Townsville.

Both Cairns and Mackay are located closer to jungle terrain. These sites may have provided better access to terrain ideal for the Army’s training purposes. Based on this assessment, it seems Townsville emerged as the location for the new base for a

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ *TDB*, 30 July 1966, p.1

variety of reasons and not just those linked to training requirements. Townsville may have been more attractive than Cairns or Mackay because it was not as prominent as an agricultural district and therefore had cheaper areas of land relatively close to the city. Townsville may have been chosen because it was already a public service town. It was larger than Cairns or Mackay and further away from the threats than Darwin, which may have been deemed too close to possible theatres of action to be deemed safe. These aspects have not been thoroughly researched in this project and would benefit from further research. Despite these alternative perspectives, the terrain located around Townsville does provide substantial training options for the Army.

In 1970, Brigadier E Logan reflected upon the establishment of the site for the Army base. He wrote that careful consideration was given to the availability of land for close training, range practices and field manoeuvres. The Brigadier listed a number of benefits including the existence of large areas of rain forest and jungle terrain at Mount Spec, Paluma and Mount Elliot. The benefits of the Mount Elliot and Paluma areas were listed as being specific to long range patrolling at the battalion level, and these areas also would provide the ability for sustained jungle terrain training for all components of the army.⁵⁹ Logan has noted that although defence personnel would spend considerable time living in the field while on training exercises, all the training areas were within reasonable reach of the site chosen for the military base in Townsville. The Brigadier made the point that defence personnel would have first class quarters and city facilities to return to and that personnel with dependents would be able to spend more time with their families due to the lesser time taken up by travel to training areas.⁶⁰

The ability for Servicemen and their families to interact within the community of Townsville was an important aspect in planning, which was referred to in a report on defence resources in the 1980s.⁶¹ The opening of Lavarack Barracks symbolised the beginning of a new era and was one of the earliest indications of a change in the way the defence force structured and deployed its resources. Traditionally, it seems, the

⁵⁹ Annex 'D' of Army Letter, General Officer Commanding, Major General MF Brogan, to Northern Command 17 November 1964, copy held by 2RAR museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville.

⁶⁰ Edgar Logan. 'Establishment of Task Force at Townsville', *Army Journal*, Canberra, no. 254, June-July, 1970) p. 17

⁶¹ Robert J Cooksey. *Review of Australia's Defence Facilities*. Report to the Minister for Defence, Kim C Beazley. 18 December 1987. (Printed in Australia by RD Rubie, Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, 1988) p. 93

defence force had chosen to concentrate its resources in Australia's south, closer to dense population centres. The establishment of Lavarack Barracks in Townsville was the first step in a reassessment of base location criteria. In a report compiled for the Minister for Defence in the late 1980s, the motive behind this reassessment was described as the need to ensure that the Army could more appropriately meet its new roles and responsibilities.⁶² Townsville's location fitted with the changing perspectives on troop deployment. The city's accessibility to transport resources and logistics support were seen as positives in the 1980s.⁶³

Over the years various analyses have highlighted many of the positive factors that seemed to have suited the Army and contributed to Townsville becoming the location for the defence base. While the geographic location of Townsville can be interpreted as beneficial, the role of the northern development agenda in the decision to locate the military base in Townsville may be significant. At first glance it appears Army officials were in favour of locating the new base in Townsville, but there is evidence to suggest that some Army officers may have preferred alternative locations to Townsville. In 1966 a Queensland Labor Party member accused the Prime Minister, Mr HE Holt, of seeking to gain political capital by criticising Defence chiefs and Public Service advisors who had recommended the base be located in Victoria.

The former director of the Northern division of the DND in 1964, Dr Rex Patterson criticised what he saw as a lack of ethics used by the Prime Minister in his speech at the opening of the military base in Townsville. Dr Patterson claimed that the Prime Minister had breached the trust of advisors and defence chiefs by revealing the content of secret discussions held over the location of the base. At the ceremony to open the new military base, the Prime Minister stated that Government Ministers had favoured Townsville as the site for the base in the interest of Northern development. He also stated that the 'decision to establish this base here was not primarily a military one.'⁶⁴ He added that the military advice was that the base should be located on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria. However, he also noted that Cabinet considered Northern development as critical and therefore this position was pivotal in

⁶² Ibid. pp. 7 & 91

⁶³ Ibid. p. 93

⁶⁴ *TDB*, 30 July 1966, p.1

Cabinet's decision to override the military advice and locate the base in Townsville. Dr Patterson subscribes to a different chain of events regarding the Government decision to neglect military advice in the favour a civilian based agenda. He claims that 'if it had not been for a chain of fortuitous circumstances' the base would have been located in Victoria.⁶⁵

Just over a week after the opening of Lavarack Barracks, Dr Patterson said that his own report delivered to the People of the North Committee in October, 1964 claimed that establishing a military base in the area would be a profitable method for initiating growth in Townsville. His report detailing options for stimulating growth in the north of Australia had received significant national and local publicity in the days after its release. Dr Patterson's report had been publicised in Townsville's print media on 19 October 1964.⁶⁶ By delivering this recommendation prior to the Government's public announcement regarding the conclusions of the defence review in November 1964, Dr Patterson and his colleague, Sir Harold Raggatt, believed they inadvertently changed the intended location of the base. In light of the publicity generated by Dr Patterson's report, the defence chiefs were furious that their work spent on establishing defence based recommendations on the location of the new base were undermined in the public domain. This was done prior to their having an opportunity to finalise their advice to Government on the specifics of the defence base.

Evidence of the fury of defence chiefs and Government at the announcements made by Patterson and Raggatt is illustrated by the testimony of Dr Patterson that he was summoned to the Prime Minister's office on 19 October 1964 and reported for embarrassing the Government. He was also told by the Prime Minister that he and Sir Harold Raggatt were not permitted to discuss defence matters. In his 1966 recollection of those events, Dr Patterson claimed that he and Raggatt had no idea that the military and the Government were reviewing defence infrastructure and planning to build a new base. In the opinion of Dr Patterson the Government would have found it difficult to establish a defence base in Victoria considering the recent publicity preceding his report on Northern development.

⁶⁵ *TDB*, 9 August 1966. p. 2

⁶⁶ *TDB*, 19 October 1964. p. 2

It has been demonstrated in Chapter One that the decision by Government to locate a large defence base in Townsville was not anticipated locally despite Dr Patterson's report. However, the significance of his report meant that when the decision was announced by the Government, some locals linked it with an emphasis on Northern development. One senior North Queensland RSL official, Mr AJ Sherriff, who had recently returned from an RSL national congress, stated that any permanent deployment in Townsville would improve development in the area and improve the general economy of north Australia.⁶⁷ Northern development has undoubtedly figured in how the base's consequences for Townsville have been characterised in many analyses conducted since the establishment of the base.

⁶⁷ *TDB*, 10 November 1964. p. 3

Chapter Three

The Base Project in 1965

It has been established that external events contributed to the Australian Federal Government's mid-1960s initiative to invest in defence resources. The investment led to Townsville becoming the location for a new defence base. Important developments in the areas of foreign and defence policy during 1965 coincided with a series of pivotal negotiations associated with the army base project. The previous chapters have detailed some of the influential events and policies leading to the expansion of army resources and infrastructure. The main point is that the decision to build a new military installation was based on the global implications of the situations in Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia. The final decision on where to locate the base strengthened the relationship between the locality of Townsville and the globally significant events associated with Vietnam. The presence of external influences and certain domestic agendas among the motives behind the establishment of Townsville's base project is evident.

Following the 1964 announcement that a base was to be constructed in Townsville, and prior to the opening of the base in 1966, significant negotiations between local council, the Army, and State and Federal Government occurred. Throughout the planning negotiations, the TCC resisted some of the Army's demands and Federal Government propositions. The main points of contention concerned land requirements, infrastructure, government and defence responsibilities, and the provision of funding for various subsidiary projects and initiatives. Disagreements over land use and land boundaries arose and issues regarding the provision of amenities and other services involved several disputes which protracted negotiations. Each level of government and the Army had to overcome these issues in order to achieve the aim of establishing the base in Townsville. Many of these issues materialised throughout 1965, but were suitably overcome after intensive negotiations. This chapter will examine some of these and provide analysis of issues surrounding land requirements, funding and infrastructure. The analysis will be conducted in recognition of the idea that history cannot be written unless the historian

can achieve some kind of contact with the mind of those about whom he or she is writing.¹

It is necessary to make some assumptions in order to fathom the relationship between the various parties involved in the negotiations. This chapter will analyse the negotiations in light of the assumption that 1965 was a significant year for Australia's foreign policy and defence arrangements. During the planning stage for the base in Townsville, Australia deepened its involvement in the Vietnam War. It is assumed that the intensification of Australia's military and political involvement in the global struggle promoted a level of urgency which was arguably present throughout the developmental phases of the base project. In an attempt to discover the thought and contextual basis behind some of the negotiations, it may be necessary to display an imaginative understanding of the minds of the people involved.² In light of this idea, it is assumed that the wider external events of the times had some influence on the domestic and local issues of the base project.

It has been argued that the decision to locate the base in Townsville involved a rapid process of selection. Given the timeframe of the events leading to the public announcement concerning the location of the base, it appears the selection process did not include an itinerary of intensive research or advanced planning. The major planning and negotiation occurred several months after Townsville was named as the likely location for the base. Each level of government and the Army held negotiations throughout 1965. These negotiations were held at about the same time that Australia was ramping up its political and military involvement in the Vietnam War. While the Federal Government deployed Australian combat forces to Vietnam, the TCC negotiated the base plans with the Army. It appears there were many issues to resolve, including financial responsibilities and land acquisition. This chapter will focus on some of the negotiations centred on these topics.

Throughout the period under examination the local council indicated to the media that it would require abnormally high amounts of aid and cooperation from State and

¹ EH Carr. *What is History? The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures delivered in the University of Cambridge January - March 1961.* (Macmillan, London, 1961) p. 19

² *Ibid.* p. 18

Federal Governments. Along with land acquisition, funding was an important issue which was central to many of the negotiations. The issue of funding also received prominence in the local media. An editorial from June 1965 suggests the local council faced enormous responsibility during the financial year of 1965-1966. The editor stated that the Federal Government was obligated to come to the aid of local ratepayers and concluded that Townsville should receive special consideration due to its rapid growth rate.³ It insisted Townsville would require mass funding from State and Federal Government to 'cope with the extraordinary demand which will be placed on local authority by the influx of people to Townsville associated with the Army program'.⁴ The Mayor was clearly aware of the significant funding required to successfully undertake such a project, stating that the 'council would require quite a substantial amount of finance over its normal allocation'.⁵

Around the same time it was reported in Townsville that discussions between the local council and the army on the proposed £5,000,000 army base were to be resumed later that month.⁶ This followed from talks held in Canberra between the Mayor of Townsville, A Smith, and the Minister for the Army, AJ Forbes. Described as a 'deputation' in the local media, the representatives focused their discussions on the provision of services to the base. The local media reported that Townsville's Mayor indicated the army wanted 'to start site works [at the base] at the earliest opportunity'.⁷ A letter written by the Prime Minister of Australia to the Premier of Queensland on 9 December 1964 contains evidence that the Federal Government wanted the base to be at least partially operational by 1966. In the letter the Prime Minister indicated that 'the Department of the Army is basing its planning on a timetable which provides for the first unit to be moved to Townsville in late 1966.' Adding his personal preference to the above goal, he stated that he was 'hopeful that this objective can be met' and indicated that the purpose of the letter was to inform the Premier what the Commonwealth 'had in mind' and to ask for the Queensland

³ *TDB*, June 15 1965. Editorial p. 2

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *TDB*, May 7 1965. p. 2

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

Government's cooperation.⁸ It appears that Canberra and the Army expected negotiations to achieve certain aims rather quickly.

According to the local media, this was certainly the interpretation of Townsville's mayor on 7 May 1965.⁹ The Federal Government and the Army seemed to believe that resistance to their objectives and demands would be minimal. They may have underestimated the local council's willingness to highlight concerns. Believing instead that local council and other northern entities would have been so eager to develop the north that acceptance of their terms was almost guaranteed. It must be considered that the Federal Government could have threatened to take the base elsewhere had negotiations with Townsville become too difficult. Despite the pressure to obtain particular goals emanating from high levels of government, the evidence indicates the development of plans and finalised agreements demanded intensive negotiation between the parties involved. The council obviously had some concerns regarding the Army's intentions. Although it expressed some of these, it is possible that impetus to resolve issues stemmed from the implication that the security of northern Australia was linked to the rapid implementation of the project. It appears all parties were resolved to promote their needs and highlight their concerns.

Logan's interpretation indicates that the magnitude of the Army's requirements necessitated the full cooperation from civil authorities. Logan's assessment indicates there may have been pressure on the council to accept the plans of the Army and the Federal Government. The Government and the Army wanted to ensure viable outcomes were achieved in the planning stage and in doing so, adopted a level of seniority in the planning phase. It has also been stated that the nature of the project, with its many associated political and social implications, gave rise to conflict of interests between negotiating parties.¹⁰ In reality this scenario is not surprising given the involvement of the three tiers of government, the Army and other entities. The Army was eager to establish its new base and appears to have conducted its negotiations accordingly, while other parties were equally keen to see that their needs were also appeased. Each party drew inspiration for their objectives from a range of

⁸ Government letter, Prime Minister of Australia, RG Menzies, to Premier of Queensland, GFR Nicklin, 9 December 1964. Copy held by 2RAR museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville.

⁹ *TDB*, 7 May 1965. p. 2

¹⁰ Logan. 'Establishment of Task Force at Townsville'. *Army Journal*, no. 254, June-July, 1970 p. 18

local, national and internationally based issues. While much of the planning stage concentrated on local issues, external events were an influential variable in the negotiations, particularly in the mindset of Army officials. Perhaps the desire of the Army to begin work on the base as quickly as possible stemmed from concerns about the demands placed on its resources due to the escalating Vietnam War.

An intensification of the struggle in Vietnam in 1965 resulted in the US committing thousands of combat soldiers to a rapidly evolving war. A snapshot of the influence the Southeast Asian developments had on Australia's political and military position is captured by comments made by the Minister for External Affairs, PMC Hasluck. The minister made the comments whilst in London at a meeting of the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in 1965. Under the title 'Third World War Risk Greater in Southeast Asia', Hasluck was reported to have stated that 'Southeast Asia is the frontline in the struggle for world security'.¹¹ Ian McNeill and others have appropriately asserted that at this time the stakes for both the American and Australian governments were perceived to be high.¹² In light of this scenario and the position expressed by the minister it is understandable that Canberra quickly responded to an American request to contribute combat forces to Vietnam.

The Australian Government's decision to increase military operations in Vietnam was met with political disapproval by some elements within the Labor Party. Townsville's print media covered this issue with a report headed 'Opposed to Dispatch of Troops to Vietnam'.¹³ The report stated the New South Wales Labor Party had declared opposition to the Federal Governments' despatch of Australian troops to Vietnam.¹⁴ These actions occurred while Townsville's local council developed plans with top Army officials for a base in the city. Some community groups and individuals urged action against government policy on Vietnam, but it appears they did not relate the actions in Vietnam to the plans for the base in Townsville. As the Australian Government increased its political and military commitments in Vietnam, the media slowly increased coverage of the war and its related issues.

¹¹ *TDB*, May 4 1965. p. 1

¹² McNeill. 'The Australian Army and the Vietnam War'. p. 23

¹³ *TDB*, 15 June 1965. p. 1

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

During the early stages it appears there was not expansive media coverage of the Vietnam War. As a result of increasing military action the political climate in Australia and the USA intensified with more scrutiny applied to the decisions being taken by the incumbent governments. This climate possibly encouraged more media attention toward the war. Australian historian Geoffrey Bolton noted that during the early stages of the major build up in the Vietnam War a Morgan Gallup poll conducted in July 1965 ‘showed that 59 per cent approved of Australia’s involvement and 27 per cent opposed it’.¹⁵ Bolton believes that the views of Australians at this time were not informed by adequate media coverage.¹⁶ It is possible an initial lack of print and other media coverage of events overseas facilitated support for or indifference toward the Commonwealth Government’s foreign policies, and also hindered the Townsville public making a connection between the Army’s commitments in Vietnam and the establishment of a base nearby.

Townsville’s local newspaper did not have its own reporters on the ground in Vietnam. The paper relied on reports gleaned from international media agencies and government or other institutional sources. One analysis suggests only ‘two Melbourne newspapers had full-time correspondents in Southeast Asia’ and ‘the Australian press depended largely on syndicated material from overseas tailored for North American or European readers’.¹⁷

It would appear that the local reports appearing in Townsville on the Cold War and Vietnam issues were sourced from overseas material. As a result the material probably lacked analysis based on Australian and especially local, perspectives and interests. In the absence of a great quantity of primary reporting based on Australian perspectives, the Commonwealth Government may have found it easier to promote its foreign and defence policies to the public without much scrutiny. In the same sense it is arguable that the Army found it easier to encourage support for their initiatives.

¹⁵ Geoffrey Bolton. *The Oxford History of Australia, Volume 5, The Middle Way, 1942-1995*. (2nd Edition, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1996) p. 167

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

The early support for the war is possibly highlighted by the response to the homecoming of the First Battalion (1RAR). 1RAR were the first Australian troops committed in large numbers specifically for combat purposes in Vietnam. The troops returned to Australia in June 1966 after a year-long tour of duty. An estimated '300,000 Sydneysiders applauded the battle hardened and battle saddened regulars' at a street parade.¹⁸ It was reported in Townsville that some of the troops were not happy about marching in the parade. One soldier is reported as saying the march was conducted to serve 'political purposes.'¹⁹ Although the political controversy and adverse publicity concerning Vietnam had not yet reached its height, the soldier's comment provides some evidence that controversy already existed in relation to the war. The lack of popular disapproval at this time of the Vietnam War and Australian troops' participation in it is indicated by a brief interruption which occurred during the parade. Labelled a 'disturbed loner', a person made an individual protest, although he was not known to be linked to any specific 'political or protest group.'²⁰ This incident has been described by Rowe as 'a bad omen, foretelling [the] troubled times to come.'²¹ As time wore on Vietnam became far more controversial.

Although controversy had not peaked in mid-1965 and unfavourable media scrutiny was lower than later in the war, some Australians and Townsville locals did not support the war or Australia's involvement. A petition urging Townsville residents to express their dissatisfaction with the Vietnam War was circulated locally in 1965. Reverend John Beer, chair of a local community group known as the Townsville Peace Committee, implored Townsville citizens to call for an 'abandonment' of bombing raids and other action in Vietnam.²² After the front page appeal from the reverend, the Townsville Peace Committee ran a piece titled 'Petition for Peace in Vietnam' in early May 1965.²³ The petition contained statements such as 'the present military actions in Vietnam...are taking a course that threatens all mankind', and suggested the Australian Government should react to 'world-wide appeals' to negotiate a peace deal.²⁴ The petition was to be sent to Canberra to the Minister for

¹⁸ Rowe. *Vietnam: The Australian Experience*. p. 53

¹⁹ *TDB*, 3 June 1966. p. 1

²⁰ Rowe. *Vietnam: The Australian Experience*. p. 53

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *TDB*, 30 April 1965. p. 1

²³ *TDB*, 7 May 1965. p. 10

²⁴ *Ibid.*

External Affairs, Paul Hasluck. While the petition called for citizens to express dissatisfaction about the Vietnam War, it did not contain any objections or references to the ongoing negotiations about Townsville's impending military base.

This fact and the lack of publicity suggesting otherwise indicates that locals who were against the US and Australia's deepening involvement did not establish a link between the war and the base project, though it is clear that the Vietnam War did affect the project. In mid-1965 the first Australian combat battalion landed in Vietnam ready for duty. The landing came after the Prime Minister advised the House of Representatives on 29 April that an infantry battalion would be sent into Vietnam.²⁵ From this time Australia's already functioning military engagement in Vietnam took on a new and demanding role. The commitment probably increased internal scrutiny on Australia's defence capabilities and contributed to a climate which legitimised an urgency to acquire further resources for defence initiatives.

One possibility is that the Vietnam situation potentially enhanced the desire of the Federal Government and the Army to quickly establish an operational base at Townsville. It would have been known that once the base was established the army would obtain unprecedented access to jungle training areas and acquire additional logistical resources. A former Army officer suggests that all parties concerned with the base project would have been aware of the mutual benefits that were to be derived from the defence establishment.²⁶ Major General MF Brogan indicated that the local council was aware of the commercial, as well as security advantages, that having a force in the area would provide the city of Townsville.²⁷ However, it can be argued that the Army stood to gain the most from the project. They hoped to reap the benefits of having an operational base in northern Australia established as quickly as possible. If the escalating Vietnam involvement did affect the negotiations, it might have been in a fashion that reduced the Army's patience for disruptions.

The Army's deployment in Southeast Asia and the Federal Government's political commitment to Vietnam probably affected the Army's expectations of the base

²⁵ Bolton. *The Oxford History of Australia, Volume 5, The Middle Way 1942-1995*. p. 160

²⁶ Logan. 'Establishment of Task Force at Townsville', p. 18

²⁷ Army Letter, Brogan to Northern Command, 17 November 1964.

project. The external factors may have heightened their urgency for suitable outcomes in negotiations. There is evidence that, having made its decision in November 1964, the Federal Government wanted construction completed by December 1968.²⁸ This meant that base was supposed to be ready to house 4,000 personnel by 1968.²⁹ While it is likely the Army and the Federal Government would have preferred for the planning and development stage of the project to proceed quickly and without complication, it seems that the actual negotiations were anything but uncomplicated. The lack of public consultation and advanced planning in the initial stages might have contributed to the emergence of substantial points of contention in 1965. The alacrity and zeal of the early stages tempered as the complexity of the project spawned intense communication between negotiating entities. It appears that early in the project, the actual site for the barracks became the first subject of contention.

The land on which it was planned to build the base, the northern slopes of Mount Stuart, was owned, under freehold, by Queensland Meat Exporters. Evidence that the local council fully supported the intention of the Federal Government and the Army to acquire the lands is found in the letter written by the Mayor of Townsville, A Smith, to the Prime Minister of Australia on 27 November 1964. In the letter Smith clearly states 'I therefore propose to have the Department of the Interior proceed immediately with the compulsory acquisition of those portions... owned by private persons or organisations.'³⁰ The land became the subject of a bitter dispute between the Commonwealth and the private owners. A military document alleges the Queensland Meat Exporters were difficult to negotiate with and that the company demanded exorbitant compensation.³¹ This analysis is difficult to verify as there does not appear to be a great deal of local media coverage concerning this issue. In any case the situation appears to have ended up with the compulsory acquisition of land being recommended by the Army. An unofficial copy of a document dated 4 May 1965 stated that the Department of the Interior failed to reach agreement with the landowners in respect to the acquisition of land within the proposed barracks area at

²⁸ Logan. 'Establishment of Task Force at Townsville', p. 19

²⁹ Army Letter, Brogan to Northern Command, 17 November 1964.

³⁰ Council Letter, Smith to Menzies, 27 November 1964.

³¹ *The Lavarack Barracks Project – Townsville Queensland The First Phase*. [c.1966], 2RAR Museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville. p. 2

Townsville. It appears that the Army sought to apply for the invocation of the compulsory provisions of the Lands Acquisition Act in respect of the land under question.³² The events associated with the acquisition of the lands at the site for the base were not the only troubles with land issues. At various stages in the planning phase land issues dominated negotiations and appear to have caused some strain on relations. Despite the occurrence of disputes, relations appear to have been quite amicable between the various parties involved.

The development of reasonably productive relations may have been helped by an early recognition that relations between the army and the civilian representatives were important for the future sustainability of the base. Relations between the negotiating parties do not appear to have deteriorated in such a manner as to render resolutions unachievable. It has been previously stated that in an attempt not to damage the relations between the Army and the community, various authorities adopted a tactful and patient approach to affairs concerning the land acquisition problems.³³ The development of healthy relations between defence authorities and local representatives was considered to be of great importance. Major General TS Cape of Northern Command had striven since the beginning of the project to ensure good relations existed between the Army and local citizens.³⁴

In April 1965 the Minister for the Army announced that the army planned to have 4,000 troops stationed in Townsville by 1968.³⁵ The Minister also announced the composition of the deployment to Townsville, with the force reported to eventually consist of three infantry battalions, a field regiment, engineers and support troops.³⁶ The nature of his announcement indicates that the Army had detailed plans for their longer term involvement in Townsville. Given the assumption that the Army intended to develop and increase their presence in Townsville it is likely they sought healthy relations with the local community.

³² Unofficial copy of document subject titled 'Compulsory Acquisition of Land' dated May 4, 1965 signed by Alex E Ross Brigadier for Major-General, Quartermasters General. Copy held at 2RAR Museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville.

³³ Logan. 'Establishment of Task Force at Townsville'. p. 18

³⁴ *The Lavarack Barracks Project – Townsville Queensland The First Phase*, Section 72. [c.1966], 2RAR Museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville. p. 10

³⁵ *TDB*, 28 April 1965. p. 1

³⁶ *Ibid.*

In determining the location of the barracks a great deal of emphasis was placed on the interaction between defence force personnel, their families and the rest of the civilian and business community of Townsville. It was decided that the base should be located near enough to the city centre that troops could enjoy the city's recreational and community facilities. The proximity was also important so that married men and women of the defence force could be accommodated with their families close to the base in additional housing built in existing or near to existing suburbs. According to one analysis, the location chosen for the barracks on the northern facing slopes of Mount Stuart achieved the purpose of providing Army personnel and their families' access to the same amenities as Townsville's civilians, and was compatible with TCC's Master Town Plan.³⁷

Despite the analysis indicating that the Mount Stuart location fitted with the council's plan, there were problems associated with land adjacent to the edge of the proposed site for the Army base. In April 1965 a combined party of Army and Commonwealth Department of Works officials inspected the area at Mount Stuart and had discussions with local council staff. According to one source this meeting was when the first signs of disagreement between the Commonwealth and the TCC appeared.³⁸ According to certain documents Townsville's Mayor signed off on a letter sent to the Minister for the Army on 30 April 1965, which detailed the local council's five main concerns regarding the planning for the base project.

The concerns surrounded the council's perception that the Army was interfering with the environs of the university and the proposed residential area to the west of the university site. The council wanted access to the television transmitters on top of Mount Stuart, and sought a guarantee that the Army would not exploit the water catchments area to the west of Mount Stuart and hoped that the balance of the north face of Mount Stuart would also be free from Army exploitation.³⁹ It appears that at a meeting with the combined party of Army and Commonwealth Department of Works

³⁷ Logan. 'Establishment of Task Force at Townsville', pp. 16-17

³⁸ *The Lavarack Barracks Project – Townsville Queensland The First Phase*, Section 11. [c.1966], 2RAR Museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville. p. 2

³⁹ *The Lavarack Barracks Project – Townsville Queensland The First Phase*, 'The Close Training Area' section 25. [c.1966], 2RAR Museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville. p. 4

officials in April, the council learned that the Army was to require the whole capacity of a particular water reserve, number R 352. In a letter written by the Mayor of Townsville to Minister for the Army it was outlined that the council was concerned about the Army's intention to use the whole reserve.⁴⁰ Considering these concerns it is assumed that the allocation of lands and finalisation of crucial details had not yet been agreed, eight months after the initial proposal to construct a military base in Townsville. There was confusion over the amount and exact locations of land the Army required. It was at this stage that the council began to resist some of the Army's demands.

In late June 1965 Townsville's Mayor 'emphatically denied' that the TCC was against the acquisition of certain land by the Army because of the personal interests of some civilians.⁴¹ Prior to that denial the paper reported that the Mayor refuted claims that 'two aldermen who own[ed] land in the area' were holding up the Army scheme in Townsville.⁴² This potential scandal added to the confusion associated with negotiations regarding land.

A print media report suggests the Army's initial land requirement for its base, housing land and training areas was up to 7,000 acres. Some issues arose when in mid-1965 the media reported that this had increased to a total of up to 19,000 acres. As early 1964 the council had expressed surprise at the amount of land required. An attachment to the letter sent from General Officer Commanding, Major General MF Brogan, to Northern Command revealed that the Army intended to acquire approximately 20,000 acres of mainly State owned land.⁴³

Council had expressed its objection to the Army using land near to the university area and the Ross River. The Mayor is reported as saying 'the council must protect the Ross River water supply.'⁴⁴ There are also indications within the media that the council was 'disturbed' by the Army's intention to acquire lands reaching as far as the

⁴⁰ Council letter, sent by the Mayor of Townsville, A Smith, to Minister for the Army, AJ Forbes, on 30 April 1965. Copy held by 2RAR museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville.

⁴¹ *TDB*, 30 June 1965. p. 2

⁴² *TDB*, 29 June 1965. p. 1

⁴³ Annex 'B' of Army Letter, Brogan to Northern Command, 17 November 1964.

⁴⁴ *TDB*, 23 June 1965. p. 2

southern banks of the Ross River.⁴⁵ It is hard to criticise a local government that sought to protect its water supply by seeking to ensure it kept control over the use of the land immediately adjacent to it. It is equally difficult to criticise the council over its desire to protect lands adjacent to the university campus. The new university site was greatly important to the city and the local council probably deemed it had a responsibility to protect the lands near to it so the campus had the ability to expand in the future.

The Premier of Queensland had also weighed into negotiations concerning the land adjacent to the university campus and the various water reserve issues. In a letter to the Prime Minister, the Premier stated his support for the council's intention to protect certain lands. The Queensland Premier implored the Prime Minister not to allow certain lands to be acquired by the Department of the Army with the consequences being the destruction of the ability to build the university according to its original plans. The Premier stated that 'my colleagues and I feel most strongly about this particular matter.'⁴⁶

The disagreements over land allocation seemed to annoy the Army or at least propel them to seek alternatives. On the 22 June the headline 'Army Officers to Talk with Cairns Mayor' appeared in Townsville's print media. The article stated an Army officer had assessed the possibility of Cairns becoming the site for the northern military base. The forum held between the Army officer and the Mayor of Cairns was conducted in case plans to build in Townsville broke down.⁴⁷ Army officers had also held discussions with local authorities in Rockhampton.⁴⁸ In light of the TCC's objections to land demands, the Army assessed their options and certainly considered other possibilities within the region.

The stalling of negotiations over land settlement in Townsville encouraged the hopes of community members and local authorities elsewhere. Colin Pembridge posted a full page advertisement in the Cairns Post highlighting the advantages of placing the

⁴⁵ *TDB*, 30 June 1965. p. 2

⁴⁶ Government Letter, Premier of Queensland, GFR Nicklin to Prime Minister of Australia, RG Menzies. 26 May 1965. Copy held by 2RAR museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville.

⁴⁷ *TDB*, 22 June 1965. p. 2

⁴⁸ *TDB*, 23 June 1965. p. 2

Army base in Cairns over Townsville. The advertisement appeared in the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* and carried the headline ‘An Army Base in Cairns’.⁴⁹ A couple of days later the headline ‘Sarina Bid for Army Base’ appeared in Townsville. TG Newberry, the Member for Mirani and Chairman of Sarina Shire Council applied to establish a troop training area in Mackay following indecision over the plans in Townsville.⁵⁰ These outcomes appear to have had a galvanising effect on negotiations in Townsville, contributing to the pressure on Townsville authorities to appease the Army without delay.

The eagerness expressed by other authorities and the apparent non-negotiable terms of the Army’s requirements hastened the process of talks in Townsville. Three top ranking Army officials held talks with Commonwealth Department of Works officers in Townsville and one Army official, Major-General TF Cape asserted ‘if it [the required land] can’t be made available, the Army must go somewhere else.’⁵¹ He also said if the local authority’s land offer fell short of the Army requirement they would be ‘letting down the army and the taxpayer.’⁵² After these comments were made council contemplated its position and submitted a set of responses to the Army’s demands.

Part of the council’s response addressed the prominent issues such as the distribution of lands adjacent to the university and the Ross River water supply. The media reported that subject to the payment of compensation, council conceded it would not object to the Army’s request to the use of land on the east banks of the Ross River.⁵³ According to the same report the council also expected the Army to alter its northern border so that the backdrop of the university area would be protected.⁵⁴ It took four days for confirmation to appear in the newspaper that the council’s response had been accepted. This was confirmed with the front page headline ‘Townsville Named as Site for Battle Group’.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ *TDB*, 20 July 1965. p. 4

⁵⁰ *TDB*, 22 July 1965. p. 3

⁵¹ *TDB*, 1 July 1965. p. 2

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *TDB* 23 July 1965. p. 2

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *TDB*, 27 July 1965. p. 1

All sides claim that they cooperated with one another in negotiations surrounding the advanced planning. In regard to the eventual outcomes achieved this appears to be accurate. Correspondence between the Minister for the Army and the Mayor of Townsville around June and July 1965 contains details of the agreements reached and shows how the intensive negotiations did achieve positive outcomes. Although the council had some issues with the Army's land requirements, the Mayor asserted at the time that the council made all efforts to satisfy the Army's requirements. An article reported that the Mayor 'stresses' the Army has been 'offered three times as much land as it first intimated it would require.'⁵⁶ In one letter the Minister stated that there was no objection to council's proposition regarding the access road to the top of Mount Stuart; he also indicated that the land to the west of the university campus could be 'excluded from the acquisition.' The Minister added his assurance that the council need have no fears that the Ross River water supply would be contaminated and stated that 'although it is not practicable to reduce our land requirements beyond the extent mentioned I can assure you of the Army's desire to co-operate with your Council in every way possible.'⁵⁷ In response the Mayor thanked the Army's representatives for their 'clear and lucid explanations' regarding their land requirements. He then pointed out that the council representatives were to be available for further consultation with Army officials at all times.⁵⁸

While the negotiations in 1965 did achieve some positive outcomes, based on the evidence analysed in this chapter there is little doubt that relations between the various parties were fractured. This appears to have stemmed from the fact that each party, particularly the local council and the Army, avidly promoted their needs, which provided a platform for disagreement, although some of the disagreements were due to misunderstandings and poor communication. The disagreements increased the amount of negotiation required which made the planning phase an intensive process. The environment within which the negotiations occurred did influence the outcomes of the planning phase.

⁵⁶ *TDB*, 30 June 1965. p. 2

⁵⁷ Government Letter, Minister for the Army, AJ Forbes, to Mayor of Townsville, A Smith. 25 June, 1965. Copy held by 2RAR museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville.

⁵⁸ Government Letter, Mayor of Townsville, A Smith, to Minister for the Army, AJ Forbes. 2 July, 1965. Copy held by 2RAR museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville.

The negotiations concerning the planning for the base and its related subsidiary projects were shaped by domestic issues, but the negotiations were undoubtedly underpinned by the events occurring in Southeast Asia and the wider global struggle of the Cold War. The Federal Government and the Army displayed an urgent desire to speed up negotiations in order to complete plans for the base. Evidence linking external considerations to the base project is present in a letter sent by the Prime Minister to the Premier of Queensland in August 1965. In reference to an unresolved issue of contention between the local council, State Government and the Army, the Prime Minister attached 'considerable importance to the early settlement of this matter from the national defence point of view'.⁵⁹ The Prime Minister clearly linked desirable outcomes in the base project to issues of national defence and security. A short time later it was reported in Townsville that the Deputy Mayor, GV Roberts, criticised the way in which the Army had pursued its aims in relation to the base, although he is also reported to have pledged the full support of the TCC to the 'Commonwealth constructing authorities and the Army in the construction of the new base.'⁶⁰ The escalation of Australia's defence deployments in 1965 obviously increased the urgency to finalise plans for the base and placed extra pressure on the local council to cooperate and relax its usual planning restrictions.

A rapid deterioration of the political situation and an intensification of Australia's military involvement in Vietnam occurred while the council conducted its negotiations with the Army. At this time the events in Vietnam drew significant international attention and attracted controversy. The problems surrounding the negotiations for the base arose around the same time that Australia deployed its first combat troops to Vietnam in mid-1965. Resistance from the TCC in regard to some of the Army's land requirements did cause some controversy. The motivation for the council's resistance can be linked to the desire to protect a particular water supply and lands allocated for a university site. There is no evidence suggesting the council resisted Federal Government and Army demands on account of opposition to the Government's foreign policy or the Army's combat deployment to Vietnam.

⁵⁹ Government letter, Prime Minister of Australia, RG Menzies, to Premier of Queensland, GFR Nicklin 6 August 1965. Copy held by 2RAR museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville.

⁶⁰ *TDB*, 20 August 1965. p. 1

Chapter Four

The Opening of the Base

Despite the disagreements which occurred in 1965, the Army base was opened in Townsville in 1966. It appears that most of the contentious land issues were resolved in 1965, although there is evidence indicating that land issues continued to be a factor in relations between the Army and the council in 1966. Despite this, the scheduled opening of the base in 1966 went ahead. The event drew the attendance of Australia's top-ranking government and defence officials. The opening symbolised the beginning of a new era in the history of Townsville and added a new piece to the complex history of Australia's defence forces. A few months after the opening of the base the city was reminded of its previous involvement in global conflict. Townsville was visited by the President of the USA, Lyndon Baines Johnson. While the President's visit was a remarkable moment in Townsville's history, it can be linked to past military involvement in the city, when Johnson had been in Townsville before, as a serviceman in the US Military in 1942. His second visit in 1966 was during another war, Vietnam. Right through the planning and construction phase to when the base was opened, the war in Vietnam continued to gain momentum and command the attention of the government and military.

In February 1966, just after initial works had begun at the site for the base, Australia was considering the possibility of increasing its military deployment to Vietnam. It was reported in Townsville that the Prime Minister held talks with the US Vice-President, H Humphrey, in Canberra. The talks concerned ongoing operations in Vietnam and raised the question of further deployment by Australian forces.¹ Concerns about Vietnam were obviously still present at this time so it is my assumption that the relationship between the conflict and the base project continued. It has been argued that Australia's involvement in Vietnam and other conflicts in Southeast Asia contributed to the establishment of the base in Townsville. It appears that as Australia's involvement in Vietnam increased throughout the mid to late 1960s, it affected the development of the base.

¹ *TDB*, 20 February 1966. p. 1

A significant movement of troops to Townsville was scheduled for the end of 1967. The sizeable movement, which would include the introduction of servicemen and women and their dependents, was expected to have the impact of increasing Townsville's population by 7000.² It is difficult to ascertain whether this occurred in the manner in which it was reported. A conflicting report appeared a few days later. It stated that the 'positioning of an Army Task Force in the area should boost the district population by 7000 people by 1969', and that a field artillery regiment and two more battalions would complete the build up by 1969.³ These reports also vary from estimates made in 1964, which included the possibility that up to 8000 defence personnel could be deployed to the city,⁴ and another estimate made by the Minister for the Army that 4000 would be deployed by 1967.⁵ It does appear that the intended build-up of troops in Townsville was impeded by the Army's commitments in Vietnam. Cooksey asserts that the development, in terms of the permanent establishment of large numbers of personnel at Lavarack Barracks, did not eventuate until the 1970s.⁶ Troop estimates were not the only numbers associated with the base to be amended throughout the early years of the project.

On 4 July 1966 it was reported that the naming of the barracks was to occur later that month. The article included information that the Prime Minister would unveil the commemorative plaque and name the new \$26,000,000 Army barracks on 29 July.⁷ Australia had changed its currency from the Pound to the Dollar⁸, but the figure associated with the barracks had changed from its initial anticipated cost of £5,000,000 to \$26,000,000. While it must be noted that some disparity would exist due to a variance in currency value, there is still a significant difference between the figures. Perhaps some of the protracted negotiations, which began in 1965 and continued in 1966, and the alterations made in the planning phase, contributed to a change in financial figures. While the base was scheduled to be opened in mid-1966

² *TDB*, 27 June 1966. p. 3

³ *TDB*, 4 July 1966. p. 1

⁴ *TDB*, 25 November 1964. p. 1

⁵ *TDB*, 27 November 1964. p. 1

⁶ Cooksey. *Review of Australia's Defence Facilities*. Report to the Minister for Defence, Kim C Beazley. 18 December 1987. pp. 7 & 93

⁷ *TDB*, 4 July 1966. p.1

⁸ Australia converted to a decimal currency on 14 February 1966. The initial rate of the new currency was two dollars per Australian pound, or ten shillings per dollar.

and agreements had seemingly been reached on most if not all contentious land matters in 1965, evidence suggests that negotiation on land issues continued in 1966.

A letter written by the Mayor of Townsville to Major General TS Cape of Northern Command in May 1966 reveals that tension or conjectures over unresolved issues between negotiating parties still existed. In the letter the Mayor addressed an issue regarding the council's desire to establish a new quarry behind Mount Stuart. He stated that 'one of the problems still worrying us [the local council] is the establishment of a new quarry...' and that the area under question was located behind Mount Stuart and near to the 'much discussed western boundary of the Army and council land under acquisition notice.'⁹ Other issues concerning sewerage and other amenities, funding, the naming of defence housing suburbs and construction timelines continued to demand the attention of each level of government and the Army throughout 1966 and beyond. The base project is also reported to have been held up by strikes conducted by construction workers. Around 200 workers held stop work meetings to support their claims for a pay rise and site allowance. The action was reported to have involved the Townsville Trades and Labour Council.¹⁰

On 26 July the *Townsville Daily Bulletin* reported that the ceremony for the opening of the base was to be a simple one.¹¹ However, two days later it was reported that the largest number of visiting dignitaries since the visit of the Queen to Townsville in 1954 were coming to the city for the opening of the base.¹² In a contribution to positive publicity regarding the base, on the day of the opening an editorial stated that northerners would feel much safer with an Army base in Townsville.¹³ As has been previously noted, the base was opened on 29 July 1966 by the Prime Minister, Harold Holt. The base was opened as Lavarack Barracks after the late Lieutenant General Sir John Lavarack who served in the highest office of the Army as the Chief of the General Staff. During WWII he held command of the Seventh Division and the First

⁹ Council letter, Mayor of Townsville, A Smith, to Major General TS Cape of Northern Command, 16 May 1966, copy held by 2RAR museum, Lavarack Barracks, Townsville.

¹⁰ *TDB*, 12 October 1966. p. 2

¹¹ *TDB*, 26 July 1966. p. 2

¹² *TDB*, 28 July 1966. p. 1

¹³ *TDB*, 29 July 1966. p. 2

Australian Corps in the Middle East.¹⁴ After his role in the Middle East Lavarack became the commander of the First Australian Army until late in WWII before serving as the head of Australia's military mission in the US capital, Washington.¹⁵ Lavarack was also a Queenslander who served as Governor of Queensland from 1946 until 1957.¹⁶



Prime Minister Harold Holt unveils the commemorative plaque at the opening of the base.

(Source: <http://naa12.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp>)

On the day following the opening of the base there were reports detailing the events of the ceremony. There were approximately 1500 people at the ceremony. Some of the guests included the Prime Minister of Australia, Lady Lavarack, presumably the widow of Lieutenant General Sir John Lavarack, the Premier of Queensland, GFR Nicklin, and the Minister for the Army, Malcolm Fraser. The city of Townsville was represented by the Mayor, A Smith. In his address at the opening ceremony, the Prime Minister declared that Australia was going through a period of development and national progress. In reference to the development he stated that 'included in this has

¹⁴ Chris Coulthard-Clark. *Soldiers in Politics: the impact of the military on Australian political life and institutions*. (Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW 1996) p. 34

¹⁵ AB Lodge. 'The Commander: Australian Military Leadership in the Twentieth Century', in: DM Horner, *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939 – 1945*. (Australian War Memorial and Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1982) pp. 129-142

¹⁶ *TDB*, 30 July 1966. p. 2

been the necessity to give greater emphasis to the development of the northern part of Australia.¹⁷ He also said that ‘North Queenslanders have always been more conscious of defence needs... this no doubt stems from your geographical position’ and that ‘you are close to the danger areas of the North.’¹⁸ The Queensland Premier described the base opening as an event of great consequence to northern Australia.¹⁹ The Minister for the Army is reported to have described the base project as the single biggest project ever undertaken by the Australian Army in Australia.²⁰ In an editorial column the government received praise for its decision to neglect purely military advice, which had allegedly favoured a location in Victoria for the base. The editorial also stated that a major defence establishment would be a great generator of civil development.²¹ The Prime Minister’s reference to the supposed conscious awareness of Townsville residents to defence needs derived from the longstanding fear of invasion from the north and Townsville’s heavy involvement in actions associated with WWII.

All and sundry were reminded of the city’s role as a major staging point for the war in the Pacific in the 1940s when US President, Lyndon Baines Johnson, visited the city in October 1966. He had previously been in the city in 1942. On 18 October 1966 it was reported the city was preparing for the visit of the President. All police in the district were supposedly rostered for duty when the President arrived. There was an expectation that some protests might occur. It was reported that the President had mentioned Buchanan’s Hotel²² in Townsville as a place he visited in 1942 when he was a US serviceman.²³ While making reference to the strong relationship between the US and the city, the Mayor of Townsville asked residents to give the President a rousing welcome.²⁴ The Mayor’s request appears to have been acted upon as thousands greeted the President. After the visit it was reported that approximately 40,000 people had lined the streets from the airfield at Garbutt welcoming the President as his motorcade visited a couple of sites in the city.²⁵ The editorial

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 1

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid. p. 2

²² US President Lyndon Baines Johnson stayed at Buchanan’s Hotel during 1942.

²³ *TDB*, 18 October 1966. p. 2

²⁴ *TDB*, 21 October 1966. p. 2

²⁵ *TDB*, 24 October 1966. p. 1

described the reception as follows, ‘locals honoured their great guest with white-hot ardour that he [LB Johnson] will not soon forget.’²⁶

If we are to take the media reports of the President’s visit at face value, it seems that the vast majority of Townsville locals were in favour of the US President. Whether people were just enthused that a regional city such as Townsville was hosting such a distinguished guest or they were genuinely rapturous with the President himself is open to interpretation. It was certainly a momentous occasion. . The visit of a US President to Townsville during this period could be an indication that the US viewed the Australian Army’s expansion into northern Australia, via Lavarack Barracks, as an important factor in Australian-US foreign policy in Southeast Asia. The positive reception could also indicate that the Townsville public were not opposed to the Vietnam War, or Australia’s contribution toward it, at this time. Either way, two things are certain. The opening of Lavarack Barracks in Townsville in 1966 was a remarkably important moment in the history of the city and the region. It is also a point of historical significance in the story of modern development in northern Australia.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 2

Conclusion

The Cold War was a dominant part of twentieth-century international relations that split the world into a bi-polar political and economic environment. The confrontation between the USSR and the USA and their allies had repercussions for most of the world's regions including Southeast Asia. Located on the southern tip of Southeast Asia, Australia was also affected by the Cold War and its various subsidiary conflicts and proxy wars. Cold War politics and alliances powerfully underpinned Australia's foreign policy and defence doctrine. Cold War calculations were present in the conflicts which flared up in Southeast Asia in the 1960s. The intense political instability and military activity occurring within the region led to the deployment of Australian troops to various destinations, motivated by the Government's desire to establish and sustain an environment that would promote the security and prosperity of Australia. Government interest in building and preserving certain alliances influenced the deployment of Australian defence forces. In particular Australia closely identified with US objectives in Southeast Asia and supported US initiatives in the region.

Throughout the early 1960s the conflict in Vietnam continued to fester as did relations between Indonesia and some of its neighbours. By 1964, Australia and its key ally, the USA, gradually became more concerned with, and involved in, the political and military situation in Vietnam. The major phase of the Vietnam War, from 1965 to 1973, is a clear example of a Cold War proxy war with significant global consequences. During this period also, the relationship between Indonesia and Malaysia deteriorated, culminating in military clashes between various international forces. The aggressive attitude and perceived expansionist desires of Indonesia caused a great deal of concern for the Australian Government and facilitated a policy to sustain and expand Australian military deployment to Malaysia. The confrontation between the two Southeast Asian neighbours increased the attention given to Australia's existing military advisory role in Vietnam. The rapidly evolving conflict there commanded the attention of defence authorities and created a demand for increased defence resources. These confrontations reinforced the perception that Australia required protection from threats located to the north. This idea seemed to be embedded in places like Townsville, which had been attacked during WWII. These

factors influenced military and defence planners in Australia and caused the Government to conduct an internal analysis. The 1964 internal review of Australia's defence resources and capabilities led to the expansion of defence initiatives, including the establishment a new base for the Australian Army. One of the motives for locating the base in Townsville was that it coincided with the goal of developing north Australia.

The northern development agenda had a presence whenever detailed comments or reports appeared in the press about the base's establishment in Townsville. There is some information indicating that Government officials neglected an Army preference to locate the base in Victoria, although this interpretation would require further analysis. Either way the link between the decision to construct a new defence base and the location of Townsville was established quickly. Local media and other documents from the period indicate that the idea to locate a defence base in the north, possibly in Townsville, was not anticipated locally.

The lack of prior public knowledge of the Government's intention and the sequence of events detailed in chapter two reinforce the conclusion that the idea to locate a base in Townsville was formulated quickly and did not involve an intense process of planning, research or community consultation. The lack of prior consultation between the various levels of Government laid the foundation for the difficulties that arose in 1965. The global environment determining Australia's foreign policy and defence planning ultimately influenced the rapidity with which the Government conducted its domestic activities pertaining to defence issues. This is again evident in the Federal Government's and Army's desire to establish outcomes in the planning phase. Their lack of patience for disruptions to the base project was underpinned by the alarming international developments in Southeast Asia in 1965. The unstable political environment there boosted the political legitimacy of defence initiatives and also increased the pressure on the local council and other groups to conform to Government and Army requests and timeframes concerning the base project.

The location of this base was determined by several factors including the expansion of relevant Army training capabilities, an enhanced ability to deploy to Southeast Asia and a civilian development agenda. The historical decision to install an Army base at

Townsville was influenced by a combination of external events and domestic agendas. The motivation behind the establishment of Lavarack Barracks in Townsville was linked to the global political and military events associated with the Cold War, particularly the political instability and military events occurring in Southeast Asia. The project was also linked to a civilian agenda concerning northern development. It was hoped that private sector interest in the north would increase if the state led the way by establishing a large public sector in the city. This has proved to be case, as Lavarack Barracks has developed into a crucial part of the Townsville community. The motivations for the establishment of the base are primarily concerned with global events, but its consequences have been strongly felt locally.

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National Archives of Australia

Harold Holt opens Lavarack Barracks.

Source: <http://naa12.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp>

Harold Holt unveils the commemorative plaque at the opening of the base.

Source: <http://naa12.naa.gov.au/scripts/Imagine.asp>

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