



Scorched Earth

Australia's secret plan for total war under Japanese invasion in World War II

By Sue Rosen

In 1942 the threat of Japanese invasion hung over Australia. The men were away overseas, fighting on other fronts, and civilians were left unprotected at home.

Following the attack on Pearl Harbour and the Japanese advance south, Prime Minister Curtin ordered state governments to prepare. From January 1942, a team frantically pulled together secret plans for a 'scorched earth' strategy. The goal was to prevent the Japanese from seizing resources for their war machine as they landed, and capturing Australians as slaves as they had done in Malaya and elsewhere in Asia.

From draining domestic water tanks to sinking dinghies and burning crops; from training special citizen squads to evacuating coastal towns, 'Total war, total citizen collaboration' was the motto. Today these plans vividly evoke the fraught atmosphere of the year Australia was threatened with invasion.

After the war these top secret plans were forgotten. This is the first time they have ever been made public.

About the author

Sue Rosen is an historian and a heritage consultant. She is the author of several books including *Bankstown: A sense of identity*, and *We Never Had a Hotbed of Crime! Life in twentieth century South Sydney*.

Early praise

'This is a treasure trove, a gold mine, a Christmas-every-day cornucopia of rich Australian history, particularly Second World War history. Arguments over the "Brisbane Line" are settled here. Now we have the detailed plans for the "scorched earth" tactic that might follow a Japanese invasion of Australia. We know that Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Canberra were to be defended at all costs: too bad if you lived in Darwin, Perth, Adelaide or Hobart, still worse if you lived in Alice Springs or Townsville. Outside the big four cities, Australians could expect evacuation if all else looked like failing. The detail is mind-boggling: how to sabotage water supplies; how to wreck a car; a safe walking route from Grafton to Glen Innes; how to "trip" a tank with a crowbar. Read ... and wonder!'

Peter Grose, author of *An Awkward Truth* and *A Very Rude Awakening*

Edited extracts from original Scorched Earth Code documents

Battle Orders for the Plain Citizen:

- Every citizen will economise in expenditure; purchase no luxury goods or non-essentials; refrain from hoarding essentials, suspend development - and salvage aluminium, rubber, twine, rope, bags ...
- Every citizen will parcel his personal valuables, documents (birth and marriage certificates, deeds, scrip &c.) maps and luxury goods - and lodge them in a place of safety inland if possible, and destroy maps - no map, even an ordinary tourist, advertising or railway map, must fall into enemy hands.
- Every citizen will note the presence and movements of any suspicious alien stranger -German, Japanese, Italian, Finn, Thailander, ... and let it not be said that the enemy or the Fifth Column can bluff the Plain Citizen from his personal responsibility. Report to the Police.
- Every citizen will arrange for the emergency destruction of such of his goods as cannot be hidden or removed; and will see to it that he leaves nothing moveable of use to the enemy, other than house and furniture.
- Every citizen will arrange to turn on the tap of his water tanks before leaving, and puncture the tank - and spoil his well as far as possible.



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