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Australian Official War Photography from the Campaign in Greece, 1941

War images report topics that vary from extreme conflict and issues of life and death to everyday experiences that shape the lives of those involved in the conflict. Capitalist and industrial societies need large amounts of images as a “spectacle (for masses) and as an object of surveillance (for rulers)”, explains Susan Sontag, allowing the governments to distribute information that channels official views.¹ Media representations of war, Michael Griffin adds, “inevitably reflect cultural perspectives and reproduce traditions of cultural representations... invok[ing] notions of ethnic identity and nationalist mythology”.² They construct images of war by perpetuating or by adding new layers on specific themes of nationhood that inspire enlistment, boost morale and justify the involvement in the war. They also inform us about the extent of official censorship on wartime photography, which, as Prue Torney–Parlicki notes in the case of Australia, restricted and warned professional and amateur photographers about taking images that “could prejudice the effective prosecution of the war”.³

By the time of the Second World War, photography was an established medium synonymous with modernity and technological advances, and an integral part of the propaganda machine. It was assisted by the popularity of the cinemas where Movietone and Cinesound newsreels were projecting world news, the rise of ‘pic-

1. Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1978, p. 178.

2. Michael Griffin, “Media Images of War”, *Media, War & Conflict* 3.1 (2010), 7-8.

3. Prue Torney–Parlicki, “‘Grave Security Obligations’: The Australian Government’s refusal to Accredite Newspaper Photographers to Combat Areas During the Second World War”, *War & Society* 16.1 (May 1998), 109.

ture magazines' describing the events of the war, and other contemporary visual media, such as propaganda posters, advertising and commercial posters. In Australia, war photography was commissioned by a number of state institutions that had their own agenda and purpose, aiming to create images that perpetuated a sense of national belonging and nation-building. Photography "immediately became the subject of debates concerning its aesthetic status and social uses",⁴ and a main concern was how photography was used by military institutions and the government to record and promote the war back home. Official Second World War Australian war photographers constructed culturally specific representations, aiming to balance elements of photo-realism and documentary recording with the guidelines given to them by the institutions (government, army, press) that had commissioned them to do the job. Equally, since this visual material drew public attention, its controlled selection and circulation was required in order to communicate official views, to influence public opinion and to promote public support for war policies.

This paper discusses selected commissioned photographs, currently housed in the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, from the ill-fated 1941 campaign in Greece, which resulted in heavy losses for the 6th Australian and the 2nd New Zealand Divisions and whose success was seriously questioned at the time.⁵ Numerous scholars have examined Australian Second World War photography, either in a secondary role, visually supporting their historical accounts on specific battles and events of the war,⁶ or as part of

4. Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, London & New York 1996, p. 12.

5. Historians strongly believe that there was no certainty of success in the campaigns in Greece and Crete, questioning the decision of Australian and New Zealand leaders to follow Churchill's order and send their troops. See Maria Hill, *Diggers and Greeks: The Australian Campaigns in Greece and Crete*, UNSW Press, Sydney 2010; Peter Thompson–Anzac Fury, *The Bloody Battle of Crete 1941*, William Heinemann, North Sydney, NSW 2010); Peter Ewer, *Forgotten Anzacs: The Campaign in Greece 1941*, Scribe, Melbourne 2008.

6. Hill, *Diggers and Greeks*, *op.cit.*

their analysis of war imagery produced in Australia from 1939-1945.⁷ However, none of those works has specifically focused on the rich photographic material taken by the two official war photographers who covered the particular campaign, the Australian Damien Parer and the New Zealander George Silk, both working for the Australian Department of Information (DOI). The historical analysis of the Greek campaign, as part of the history of the Australian photography at war, is particularly lacking and this study fills the void.

It examines the photographic representation of the image of the Australian soldier during the short-lived campaign in Greek mainland, analysing photographs of the 2nd Australian Imperial Force soldiers merging into Greek culture, interacting with the locals in cities and villages, both at leisure and whilst marching to the front. It argues that there was a gradual change in their imagery as the photographers followed the members of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) from the cities to the frontline, moving from the strictly official constructions and ideological imaginings of the military requested by the DOI to personal and touching images of civilians badly affected by the horrors of war. The paper concludes that the conflicting agendas between the Army (Directory of Public Relations or DPR), the Department of Information and the press, in regard to producing images that could be used both as records and as publicity material,⁸ and the censorship exercised by the state to block the circulation of visual material that could impact on re-

7. Fay Anderson–Richard Trembath, *Witness to War: The History of Australian Conflict Reporting*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton Melbourne 2011; Shaune Lakin, *Contact: Photographs from the Australian War Memorial Collection*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra 2006; Neil McDonald, *War Camera-man: The Story of Damien Parer*, A Lothian Book, Melbourne 1994; Charles Meeking, *Pictorial History of Australians at War 1939-45*, Vol. II Australian War Memorial, Canberra 1957.

8. Ian Jackson, “‘Duplication, Rivalry and Friction’: The Australian Army, the Government and the Press during the Second World War”, paper given in the Conference Information Warfare: Shaping the Stories of Australians at War, 25-26 November 2010, University of New South Wales, ADFA Canberra.

cruitment rates or British-Australian relations led to a limited exposure and analysis of photographs taken during the Greek campaign. The purpose of Australian Second World War official photography was to construct images of the adventurous, easy-going and courageous soldiers of the 2nd Australian Imperial Force that should boost recruitment and justify the involvement of Australia in the war, sealing the fact that the specific campaign was a gamble and a costly operation for the Anzacs.⁹

Australian photography in the Second World War: institutions and purposes

The Second World War brought the broadening of Australian state institutions in charge of the photographic record of war, whose evidence, as Caroline Brothers explains, “has little to do with its particular content, or with any notion of photographic truth”, but instead with “the ideological currents which produced it and the collective imagination it inflected and to which it contributed”.¹⁰

Official war photographers were commissioned to create images to boost mobilisation and recruitment, also dealing with a contradictory brief from the official institutions in relation to war coverage. As during the Second World War there was compulsory military service for duty within the country but no conscription for service overseas, major functions of the images produced as part of the DOI campaigns were to encourage recruitment for service abroad and to boost the morale of the Australian public. Even though in February 1943 the government passed a bill that defined ‘Australia’ “in such a way as to include New Guinea and the adjacent islands”, therefore “obliging soldiers in the Citizen Military

9. “The term ‘Anzac’ ... refers to a particular kind of military formation –an army corps of two or more divisions, and under this way, an Anzac corps has been established only twice– at Gallipoli and, less famously, in Greece”. In Ewer, *Forgotten Anzacs*, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

10. Caroline Brothers, *War and Photograph: A Cultural History*, Routledge, New York 1997, pp. 185, 190.

Force (CMF) to serve in this region known as the South-West Pacific Area",¹¹ it was only towards the end of the war that obligatory conscription for the men of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) for service abroad was introduced. Men who joined the AIF during the war for service in Europe and the Middle East were volunteers.

In the photographic frenzy of the early 1940s, around 121 official photographers and cinematographers were charged with the task of collating a historical record on behalf of the Australian War Memorial. Twenty-seven were employed by the Australian Department of Information (DOI) and the remaining 94 were appointed to various military historical sections.¹² By the end of 1941, there were already two separate official organisations with opposing functions taking, collecting and releasing photographs in Australia. The first was the DOI, established in September 1939 by Robert Menzies, and charged with controlling the censorship of all media. The DOI was also responsible for "the distribution of films, posters and photos, editorial material to local and overseas media, and the maintenance of public morale".¹³ The DOI used photographs for propaganda purposes, showing the bravery, determination and readiness of Australian soldiers, introducing the foreign terrain, the enemies and the allies to Australians at home, and, ultimately, aiming to stimulate support for the war, attract volunteers and encourage recruitment. The second institution was the ex-War Records Section, becoming in 1941 the Military History and Information Section (MHIS) of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in the Middle East, and from 1942 onwards, the Military History Section of the Australian Military Force (AMF).¹⁴ Its main function was to collect material for the Australian War Memorial, treating photographs as army historical records. Apart from the two differ-

11. <http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopaedia/conscription> (accessed November 2012).

12. Norman Bartlett, *Pictorial History of Australia at War 1939-45*, Vol. I, Australian War Memorial, Canberra 1958, pp. 7-8.

13. John Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors: Censorship and Propaganda in WWII*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland 1984, p. 3.

14. Bartlett, *Pictorial History of Australia, op.cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 5-6.

ent objectives, which required different skills, techniques and standards, the absence of collaboration between the two sections led to an eventful relationship throughout the war. Finally, in early 1942 the army established the Directorate of Public Relations (DPR), whose photographers treated photographs both “as historical records and as propaganda”.¹⁵

Within this framework of conflicting agendas, Damien Parer and George Silk were sent to cover the Middle East-Mediterranean theatre of war. Parer was an experienced photographer and documentary filmmaker whose work reflected commercial and avant-gard influences inspired by Charles Chauvel, Max Dupain and John Grierson, whereas Silk was a young sports photographer from New Zealand whose appointment to the DOI was criticised by the Australian Journalists Association.¹⁶ The two men were commissioned to collect material that “would be used where practicable, and subject to censorship, for publicity purposes and then passed to the Australian War Memorial for preservation as historical records”.¹⁷ The complex nature of their assignment and the involvement of the state agencies led to the poor distribution of their war photography.¹⁸ Although Parer was primarily a cameraman while Silk mainly shot stills, there was not a clear distinction between images taken for the newsreels and stills, as frame enlargements from Parer’s films regularly appeared in newspapers and magazines. As a result, Parer’s newsreel footage was widely used in cinemas, but only a small number of Silk’s still photographs were selected by newspaper editors for publication in newspapers and magazines within Australia, such as the photo-magazine *Pix*. The fact that

15. <http://www.awm.gov.au/publications/contact/photographers> (assessed November 2013).

16. Lakin, *Contact: Photographs, op.cit.*, pp. 106-7.

17. Lakin, *Contact: Photographs, op.cit.*, p. 106.

18. Edward Louis Vickery, *Telling Australia’s Story to the World: The Department of Information 1939-1950*, PhD Thesis, Australian National University, 2003. Vickery explains that there were disputes between the Army, the Government and the Press which contributed to the poor distribution and dissemination of propaganda material.

“over 100,000 official photographs, and many hours of film” were produced by different government agencies, but only a tiny proportion of this material was ever made available to the press during the war,¹⁹ suggests a fault in the organisation of the propaganda machine in Australia which involved a large number of institutions with competing demands. This inefficiency was manifested in the limited exposure and circulation of propaganda material, and especially photography, in the Australian press.

The campaign in Greece and propaganda photography

During the Second World War, Britain had committed to send assistance to Greece which was at war with Italy from October 1940. Despite Australia voicing its concerns about the uncertain success of this mission, focusing on the disproportionately small numbers of the allied forces in comparison to the enemy and weaknesses in communications, anti-air craft defences and air support, by 27th March 1941 the 16th Brigade of the 6th Division of the 2nd Australian Imperial Force (2/AIF), the New Zealand Division and the United Kingdom troops arrived in Greece.²⁰ Although Australian and New Zealand military units went to Greece “under their own banners”, they reunited for second and last time, forming the Anzac Corps.²¹

The government had to instil patriotism in order to get high recruitment figures and an obvious choice was to draw on a previous tested pattern, the recruitment efforts of the First World War and the similarities between the 1st and the 2nd AIF. The 6th Division, the first division to be raised, was manned from the early AIF recruits, “the so-called ‘thirty-niners’”, aware of the legacy of their predecessors and determined to “live up to the standards” they had

19. Jackson, “Duplication, Rivalry and Friction”, *op.cit.*

20. Meeking, *Pictorial History of Australians*, *op.cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 8-10.

21. Ewer, *Forgotten Anzacs*, *op.cit.*

set.²² Peter Secules states that as “the sons of Anzacs were off to the Middle East again”, the government, the military and the media relied on similar themes to those used in the First World War coverage.²³ However, even though official photographers and the press used photographs from the First World War alongside those of the Second in order to underline the similarity of the first contingent, developments in contemporary documentary practice and the emergence of newsreels and photo-magazines influenced the style and technique of Second World War media coverage, also allowing Parer and Silk to express their personal and not only the official line. Damien Parer was apprenticed as a photographer and worked in Sydney with the director Charles Chauvel and with the still photographer Max Dupain. As a result, his work was influenced by the style of his contemporary Australians in motion pictures and stills, who favoured landscapes and sunlight, and his own personal preference for documentary realism and “the notion of the photograph or film as a true picture of its subject”.²⁴ George Silk understood his role as an official war photographer as ‘a crusade’ with the purpose “to reveal truths about the world and mobilise action”, and consequently his competency in the use of small and medium format cameras and his reputation as a sports photographer allowed him to produce some of the best photographs taken during the war.²⁵

As soon as the news of the Greek expedition came up, Silk and Parer secured permission to sail for Greece. The light and clarity of the atmosphere and the beauty of the Greek landscape captured the

22. Jeffrey Grey, *The Australian Army*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2001, pp. 114-15.

23. Peter Secules, “‘Everything, in fact, except respect’: The Military and Media Department of Information during the Second World War”, in *The Military, the Media & Information Warfare*, eds. Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey, Australian Military History Publications Canberra 2009, p. 65.

24. Lakin, *Contact: Photographs, op.cit.*, p. 107; Williams Maslyn, “My friend [Damien] Parer”, *Eureka Street* 4.9 (November 1994), 10-15.

25. <https://www.awm.gov.au/exhibitions/focus/george-silk.asp> (accessed 26 October 2014).

two artists, along with other members of the Australian team, especially when compared with the hot, dull and dry desert. Chester Wilmot, the official war correspondent of the Australian Broadcasting Commission for the campaign, who was travelling for the most part with Silk and Parer, favourably referred to their arrival in Greece as ‘a relief’: to be “in a country with trees and grass; mountains and streams. ... a new world where people wave to you as you go by ... a country where the people round you are also ... fighting for the same cause”.²⁶ The Australian government organised the coverage of the Greek campaign with the propaganda purpose of persuading the Australian public that “here was a people worth fighting for, regardless of the odds Australian soldiers had against them”.²⁷ Although the Australian troops’ contact with the Greeks was mainly at the battlefield whilst fighting the Italians in northern Greece and later on in Crete, the main preoccupation of the Australian government was to convey through the propaganda photographs “a positive impression of the Allied presence in Greece to the people back home”.²⁸

This was evidenced in a number of images taken by Silk and Parer while Anzacs were stationed in Athens, and which complied with the conventions of tourist photography, focusing on history, geography, culture and the culinary specialities of the chosen destination. The theme of the Australian soldier as tourist in foreign lands had been inherited from the War Memorial’s First World War official photography scheme, and it was still popular in recruitment campaigns organised by DOI. It highlighted the perspective of travelling and adventure, an appealing incentive for those young Australians who were contemplating joining the services, but it also reflected the way the Australian administrative machine was operating. In particular, it manifested the fact that the DOI had its roots in the pre-WWI Department of External Affairs, which “regularly

26. Neil McDonald, *Chester Wilmot Reports: Broadcasts that Shaped World War II*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sydney 2004, p. 112.

27. Hill, *Diggers and Greeks*, *op.cit.*, p. 132.

28. Hill, *Diggers and Greeks*, *op.cit.*, pp. 134-5.

produced photographs to publicise Australia as a tourist destination”.²⁹ Moreover, technological advances that allowed the incorporation of photographs within posters, clearly marked similarities between tourist posters advertising holiday destinations and military recruitment posters showing Australian soldiers enjoying themselves in foreign lands.³⁰

During the first few days of recovery from the Middle East theatre of war, the troops spent their time in leisure walks and sightseeing around historical sites in Athens. Parer and Silk stood by their side, recording the moves of the Australian soldiers in a number of locations in the Greek capital, posing with and interacting with Greek soldiers and civilians. Soldiers were photographed next to monuments such as the Acropolis, on city streets, within landscapes such as the mountainous front line, next to the local people, revealing that they were part of this far away setting that made them feel welcome. Showing soldiers sightseeing abroad enabled Australians at home to visually share and access the lives and adventures of their compatriots in Greece, at the same time generating effective propaganda images for publicity that aimed to boost recruitment and embrace virtues of the 1st AIF, such as mateship, courage and love for adventure.



Figure 1. George Silk, Athens. *Australian troops at the Acropolis*, black and white photograph, March 1941. Australian War Memorial, AWM006840.

29. Vickery, *Telling Australia's Story*, *op.cit.*, p. 47.

30. One such example is the recruitment poster “*Make dad proud to say ... My boy ...in the East' – JOIN THE AIF*” (ARTV04332). The photograph (007786) was taken in 1941 in Alexandria where Australians, New Zealanders, British and Greek troops arrived after their evacuation from Crete.

George Silk's *Athens. Australian troops at the Acropolis* (figure 1) visually communicates this fusion of the diggers into European culture and civilisation, surrounded by ancient Greek ruins, and invokes a legacy that dates back to Charles Bean, the official war historian of the Australian War Memorial. Bean had been inspired in his configuration of Australian national history and the military commemoration of the AIF by the Athenian democratic model, which openly commemorated the war dead in public events.³¹ As Fiona Nicoll points out, antiquities, as national 'relics' excavated by men of the AIF in Syria and Palestine during the First World War, boosted associations of the image of the digger as builder of this modern nation which was trying to define itself in relation to the already established European civilisation.³² To this end, the places in which Silk chose to photograph the Australian soldiers were easily recognisable landmarks of well known civilisations, manifesting the Memorial's intention to instil through these photographs the rich history of other cultures within the newly fabricated image of the Australian nation which lacked this kind of cultural heritage. Richard White, writing about diggers abroad during the First World War, also comments on that element of 'cultural dependence' in a "journey from the provincial" and newly formed Australia to civilised, older, deeply-historical Europe.³³ Photographs shot in ancient sites not only validate White's point, but they also confirm Australia's justified involvement in this war, as a loyal and reliable ally who showed respect for Greece's cultural heritage. A number of shots have been taken by Silk showing Australian soldiers around the Acropolis, with titles that vary from "At the Acropolis, Australian troops look around (AWM006831)" to "Australian troops inside the Parthenon (AWM006835)" and "Con-

31. Peter Londey, "A Possession for Ever: Charles Bean, the Ancient Greeks and Military Commemoration in Australia", *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 53.3 (2007), 345.

32. Fiona Nicoll, *From Diggers to Drag Queens: Configurations of Australian National Identity*, Pluto Press, Annandale, NSW 2001, p. 24.

33. Richard White, "The Soldier as a Tourist: The Australian Experience of the Great War", *War & Society* 5.1 (May 1987), 65.

trast between the modern Australian and the ancient Greece (AWM 006838)”, to name only a few. All the images metaphorically underline their presence in the land of ancient heroes, suggesting an instant association of the qualities of gallantry, and the epic even superhuman prowess of the Homeric Greek characters with the modern Australian. These photographs, products of organised state propaganda, perpetuate representations of Greece founded on the classical ideals of the Athenian democracy inspired by re-constructed traditions and symbols used to support western political ideas and interests since the philhellenic representations of the Greek War of Independence in 1821.³⁴

Another characteristic of the men of the 2nd AIF photographed by Silk and Parer is that they not only inhabited the new destination as visitors, but also interacted within it with the local population. In a number of shots, Australian soldiers are shown looking at something, assuming the strangeness and otherness of the Greeks and their culture, while in others they become active participants, sharing everyday habits and routines with the locals. In this particular context, Silk’s photographs represent the Greek ally as ‘the other’, creating new configurations in the relationship between Australians and Greeks, of visitor and host, observer and participant. The lines in these polarities, however, were often crossed as the Australians not only interacted but even become part of the host community, recorded by Silk’s camera in a documentary way that blends the Australian soldiers with both the Greek army and the civilians.

34. Anna Efstathiadou, “Representing Greekness: French and Greek Lithographs from the Greek War of Independence (1821-27) and the Greek-Italian War (1940-41)”, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 29.2 (2011), 191-218.



Figure 2: George Silk, Athens.
All good friends together. Greek soldiers on leave from Albania do their best to make the Australians welcome. There is a new optimism evident in Athens since the arrival of our troops who are being welcomed like honoured guests. As far as our men are concerned their general opinion is that Greece is the finest country in the world – bar one. March 1941. Australian War Memorial, AWM 006809.

In figure 2, the Australian troops relax and share a drink with their allies before they all make their way to the mountains of northern Greece. The propaganda purpose of the image is evident as the caption stresses the important role undertaken by of the 2/AIF to stand by the side of their allies at this decisive moment of the war:

All good friends together. Greek soldiers on leave from Albania do their best to make the Australians welcome. There is a new optimism evident in Athens since the arrival of our troops who are being welcomed like honoured guests. As far as our men are concerned their general opinion is that Greece is the finest country in the world – bar one.

As Neil McDonald and Peter Brune explain in relation to captions, the photographers had to fill in a dope sheet along with the image upon dispatch to the DOI.³⁵ They had to describe the photo, giving it a title or a caption, and mention when and where the se-

35. Neil McDonald–Peter Brune, *200 Shots: Damien Parer, George Silk and the Australians at War in New Guinea*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW 1998, p. vi.

quences were taken. Shaune Lakin adds that quite often there were two captions per image, especially by the Military History photographers, one comprehensive and accurate for the record, with the “phraseology of the official document”, and another one shorter and catchier for photographs aimed for the press.³⁶ The message in this particular photograph is strengthened by the Australian soldier on the left hand side who looks directly to the viewers, raising his glass and inviting them to join in this merry atmosphere. The photographer has positioned himself higher than his subjects to capture this dynamic image that focuses on a joyous moment of social interaction between Australians and Greeks. In an almost circular seating arrangement, the ‘circle of friends’ becomes a visual symbol that denotes feelings of warmth and protection, promoting a union based on the common goal of combating the Italian and German enemies.

Beyond encounters with the local people in the streets of Athens and other residential centres, Silk and Parer documented the journey of the Australian troops to the front line. On April 1941 Silk’s photographs depicted as realistically as possibly the difficult circumstances faced by the Australian soldiers on the Greek mountains. The pictorial account of landscape was a popular theme of official war photography, especially as the photographer aimed to provide a memorial record of the places where the Anzacs fought and lost their lives. For the government and the press, there was a fine line in getting the balance right between the naivety of pictorialism and the factualness of a snapshot able “to fix an epic”, to represent the war as “a subject matter of an advertising campaign”.³⁷ Greece was not an exception, and the photographers had to produce

36. Lakin, *Contact: Photographs, op.cit.*, p. 113. As most of the original captions have been destroyed after being transcribed into the caption books by the DOI in the 1940s, it is sometimes the dates that indicate when the negatives actually arrived at DOI’s offices.

37. John Taylor, *War Photography. Realism in the British Press*, Routledge, London and New York 1991, pp. 52-3.

propaganda images highlighting the strength and courage of the soldiers. The conditions were trying with the snow and the narrow winding roads through the mountains, and donkeys were the most reliable means of transport.



Figure 3: George Silk, Greece *Three diggers use donkeys as their means of transport along the mountainous roads*. Negative, April 1941. Australian War Memorial, AWM 006714.

The caption to the photograph (figure 3–006714) reads *Three diggers use donkeys as their means of transport along the mountainous roads*, and aims to record the actual conditions of the march to the front. The photograph is divided into two sections. The top half is dominated by the imposing snow-tipped Greek mountains as a commanding background, the bottom half by the Anzacs riding donkeys. The depiction of the smiling soldiers indicated their persistence, endurance and adaptability to the new landscape and its conditions, making a perfect publicity shot. Silk's Second World War photographs, like official photographer Frank Hurley's First World War battlefield scenes,³⁸ transformed the European landscape in ways to suit specific Australian nationalist purposes. The Greek landscape exuded neither a sense of destruction nor of heroism. It was a picturesque, mostly pleasing landscape that drew associations between past and present. Mount Olympus, in particular, the ancient land of the Olympian gods, became a tem-

38. Rod Giblett, "Shooting the Sunburnt Country, the Land of Sweeping Plains, the Rugged Mountain Ranges: Australian Landscape and Wilderness Photography", *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 21.3 (September 2007), 339.

porary ‘home’ of the modern Anzacs. As a meaningful landmark, Mt Olympus also featured in Nazi visual propaganda. Official war photographer Heinz Franke recorded the ascent of a team of Nazi climbers and the raising of the swastika at the top of the mountain on 20 April 1941, the day of Hitler’s 52nd birthday.³⁹ The symbolic power of the specific topos proves that, like the Philhellenes, Australian and German propagandist images continue to revisit myths of Greek antiquity in their attempts to reconstruct their own culture and history.

Figure 3 also elicits strong associations with the First World War “Man with the Donkey”, Simpson Kirkpatrick, who was carrying the wounded soldiers from the trenches in Gallipoli. For Peter Cochrane “the Simpson legend”, which was manufactured by newspapers with the purpose of increasing recruitment rates, highlighted certain characteristics of the Australian soldier, such as “the individual initiative and resourcefulness of the digger”.⁴⁰ Although the role of the donkey in the photographs of the Greek campaign was mainly to underline the different terrain and the difficult conditions the troops had to endure, it continued to emphasise determination, stamina and mateship. What it is worth noting in propaganda war photography is the reconfiguration of themes and motifs used since the First World War and which successfully managed to promote specific characteristics of the Australian male, like his ingenuity, originality and adaptability in new situations.



Figure 4: Damien Parer, Greece Australian Bren gun carrier going through the village of Daphni near Athens en route for the battle front. Negative, April 1941. Australian War Memorial, AWM 006841.

39. Alkis Ksanthakis, *Photography and Propaganda: Propaganda Units of the German Army in Greece, 1941-1944*, Militos, Athens 2012, p. 67.

40. Peter Cochrane, *Simpson and the Donkey: The Making of a Legend*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne 1992, pp. 63, 70-71.

Apart from the interaction with the Greek troops, there is an extensive coverage of images documenting the contact of Australian soldiers with civilians in the streets of Athens and other residential centres. The photograph (figure 4–006841) by Damien Parer, taken in March 1941, depicts the Australians departing Athens and moving towards the front line. Australian soldiers are ‘riding’ the armoured fighting vehicle, portrayed in the roles of rescuers and envoys of a technologically advanced country that contributes to this war with the much needed manpower and ammunition. The sight of the tank does not generate feelings of fear and uneasiness to the civilians. On the contrary, Greek children look with curiosity at the men on the Bren Gun Carrier and even wave at them. The Second World War blurred the boundaries between combatants and civilians, allowing a much closer interaction than that of the First World War. The Australian army on its way to their positions in Northern Greece, and later as it withdrew, was in constant dealings with the civilians who were living in the small towns and villages along the route. This proximity with civilians changed, varied and enriched the objectives, styles and techniques of war photography, leading war photographers to pay attention both to the civilians and to the soldiers themselves in a number of engaging encounters. From that moment onwards, Silk and Parer follow documentary practices based on their personal taste in the depiction of this war. Although they are the official war photographers of the Greek campaign, they show an interest in life of the hospitable Greek people they meet on their way to the front. Wonderful shots between the soldiers and the civilians are artfully depicted in Silk’s images where the Australians show an interest in the way of life of the local people. The rural scenes with peasants dressed in traditional attire give information about the social and economic conditions outside the Greek capital. In figure 5, a shepherd wearing his winter gown appears to discuss with two Australian officers the intricate design of his traditional shepherd’s crook. The caption that accompanies that photograph underlines that relationship between the Australian army and the local people: *The lonely shepherds found the diggers good compa-*

ny. The diggers did not mind either as the shepherds were always able to produce fresh eggs from seemingly nowhere.



Figure 5: George Silk, Greece. *The lonely shepherds found the diggers good company. The diggers did not mind either as the shepherds were always able to produce fresh eggs from seemingly nowhere.* Australian War Memorial, AWM 007808.

Chester Wilmot, in a letter sent from the front on 16 April 1941, notes that the encounters with the villagers improved the Australian diet which was otherwise based on tinned bully-beef: “Nearly every little urchin who sidles up to you in the mountains produces an egg or two from the inner recesses of his baggy clothes. You can often swap half a dozen Army biscuits for a couple of eggs and for a tin of M&V you will get anything from six to ten eggs”.⁴¹ The photograph implies nostalgia for a world uncorrupted by industry and urbanisation, appealing to the viewers’ emotions and making the role of the Australian saviour/ally even stronger.

As the Anzacs move to the front, the pictorial account of the landscape and the content of photographs start losing their mellow and relaxing tone. The content changed radically by the time the Anzac troops made first contact with the Germans on 10 April 1941. The Greeks in Eastern Macedonia had surrendered on 9 April, after gallant resistance. The Greek resistance had collapsed by 10 April, after the Germans took the town of Florina, and the 12 and 20 Greek divisions started withdrawing from their current positions at Veria Pass. The photographer and the cinematographer found themselves in the middle of this mad rush of the allied forces to withdraw rapidly as the Germans were approaching. There was

41. McDonald, *Chester Wilmot Reports*, *op.cit.*, p. 118.

virtually no allied air cover and the Luftwaffe was harrying the troops, spreading fear and causing unruly behaviour during the withdrawal.⁴² The conditions were appalling, with main arterial roads full of traffic not only from trucks and military vehicles but also from refugees.



Figure 6: George Silk, Greece. Villagers congregated in Serbia, hoping to obtain transport to the South, and for protection from the German bombs and machine gunning. April 1941 Australian War Memorial, AWM 007618.

As seen in figure 6, Silk and Parer were touched by the drama of the refugees or as Fay Anderson and Richard Trembath explain, “although Greece was depicted as ‘an Anzac epic’, the coverage was marked by ...the impact of war on the civilian population”.⁴³ Silk’s photographs, and Parer’s films, captured some poignant and graphic images of civilians fleeing their homes, which contemporary commentators of propaganda photography compare with the powerful images of Robert Capa from the Spanish Civil War.⁴⁴ With their portable and small format cameras and through their sequential shooting –the two men rarely worked in the same location, covering action in a range of different set ups and numerous shots– they produced a series of images that visually narrated a specific event. This can be clearly seen in the following photographs taken

42. For a detailed account of the withdrawal and evacuation of the Anzac troops from Greece see Hill, *Diggers and Greeks*, *op.cit.*, pp. 88-123; and also *Active Service: with Australia in the Middle East*, Australian War Memorial, the Military History and Information Section, AIF, Canberra 1941.

43. Anderson–Trembath, *Witness to War*, *op.cit.*, p. 129.

44. McDonald, *War Cameraman*, *op.cit.*, p. 88.

by Silk, which show a group of villagers trying to find a safe place on the mountains to settle with their children.



Figures 7 and 8: George Silk, Greece.

They live among the crags. People of Greece who fled to the mountains for protection against the 'Huns'. April 1941 Australian War Memorial, AWM 007766, 07765.



Figure 9: George Silk, Greece.

This little boy took his pet goat to the mountains, when he fled for protection against the 'Huns'. April 1941 Australian War Memorial, AWM 007752.

The faces of the children and the detail of a boy carrying a religious icon, a remnant of his previous normal life, communicate powerful feelings. For Ally Roche, the recording of the human side of the war, of the displaced civilians, was not part of the brief supplied by DOI.⁴⁵ The attention paid by both Silk and Parer to the refugees show how the emotional side of the war affected them and

45. Ally Roche, "The Personal View," *Wartime* 54 (2011), 42.

encouraged them to give their own interpretations on the subject, even though they knew that their images would not be chosen for Australian publications, as they fuelled debates about the futility of the Greek campaign and the inability of the military and political leadership to stand up to British demands. Beyond the complex nature of their assignment and the involvement of two major state agencies that were controlling the distribution of official war photography, Silk himself suspected that the reason so few of his photographs were circulated in the Australian press was a combination of ‘institutional mismanagement’ and the DOI’s conservatism to repeat and promote specific themes and ways of depicting Australians at war.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Parer and Silk, the ANZAC corps, and British and Greek units evacuated from mainland Greece to the island of Crete, for the next phase of the war in Greece.⁴⁷ The campaign in Crete did not seem to be sufficiently sensual and appropriate for propaganda publicity photographs. Apart from Silk’s embarkation photographs of the troops arriving in and departing from Suda Bay in Crete, which followed the tradition of the embarkation theme from the First World War, there is not an official visual record of the efforts of the Australians on Crete during May 1941. This is a sign of the pressure put on official war photographers and the competing briefs they had been given. John Treloar argues that “the keen competition on the part of the press and newsreels to cater for the public’s growing appetite for sensation” made “the gulf between the two (historical record and publicity image) wider than it has ever been”.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the control exercised by state institutions to prevent the

46. Lakin, *Contact: Photographs, op.cit.*, p. 108.

47. Major-General B. Freyberg of New Zealand was in command of all troops on the island: “15,000 British, 7,000 New Zealanders, 6,500 Australians and 11,000 Greeks”. See Charles Meeking, *Pictorial History of Australia at War 1939-45*, Vol. II, Australian War Memorial, Canberra 1957, p. 61.

48. Lakin, *Contact: Photographs, op.cit.*, p. 111.

leakage of unfavourable visual material that could impact on recruitment or British-Australian relations indicates heavy censorship in wartime propaganda with the purpose of boosting recruitment and justifying the involvement of Australia in the current war. The newspapers did not find Parer's and Silk's photographs from the Greek campaign newsworthy, and consequently they were reluctant to publish them. Instead they favoured overseas photographs and news stories about criticism of the behaviour of diggers written by correspondents from Malaya and Darwin, stories that sold better distracting attention from important political and diplomatic decisions.⁴⁹

The selected examples of official war photography discussed above show coordination and synchronisation within propaganda representations that aimed to increase recruitment by associating space with the notion of travelling, sightseeing and gaining new experiences. Second World War official photographers initially relied on an earlier body of work with pre-existing images and themes such as embarkation and Australian soldiers as tourists. These themes were "already current in popular discourse, revived and deployed for propagandist ends in narratives that pre-existed the war, or showed revealing qualities geared to strike a particular cultural chord".⁵⁰ However, the terrain, the climate and the particular allies and enemies determined the kind of images taken at the different stages of the war in the Middle East, Europe and the Pacific theatres. Unlike combat photography and its focus on heroism, masculinity and weaponry, the theme of the heroics of the Australian soldier was rather underplayed during the campaign in Greece. The specific campaign projected a portrayal of the Australian soldier focusing on his easy-going attitude and adaptability, also highlighting a much softer, friendlier and more caring side, smoothing the Australian soldier's hard-drinking and larrikin stereotype. War was seen as uniting and not dividing, bringing the allies closer and allowing for comradeship to flourish.

49. Email correspondence with Ian Jackson (AWM), 31st January 2011.

50. Brothers, *War and Photography*, *op.cit.*, pp. 35-36.

For Silk and Parer, the experience they got from the first years of the war, in the Middle East and Greece, paved the way for a more professional and well organised pictorial coverage of the Pacific theatre of war, which also brought huge success and an Oscar to Parer for his documentary on Kokoda. The war in the Pacific allowed the experienced photographers to establish their reputations inspired by the landscape and the jungle warfare, adapting to the new environment and its needs, but also revealing changes in the public's account of the war and the face of the enemy.

