

Japan and the British Commonwealth's War in Korea, 1950-1957

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Through interviews, oral histories, and innovative research methodologies, the presentation aims to elucidate the role of the British Commonwealth's Japanese infrastructure in enabling it to fight in Korea. The British Commonwealth Occupation Forces (BCOF) were an important component of the Allied Occupation of Japan from 1945 to 1952. The sudden outbreak of war on the Korean peninsula in June 1950 meant that the Australian military in Japan were ideally positioned to fight alongside the US forces in Korea. The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) at Iwakuni had a squadron of fighters operational long before the US Air Force (USAF) and the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) were patrolling Korean waters with the US Navy right from the outset. Ground forces from Australia, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, and later, Canada was also sent to fight alongside South Korean and US forces from late September 1950 onwards, in what became the British Commonwealth Forces Korea (BCFK). Using BCOF's military bases, barracks, maintenance workshops, and its extensive network of health, welfare, and recreational facilities, Japan effectively served as BCFK's "forward base" during the conflict and provided the organizational and infrastructural foundations of the understudied British Commonwealth (BCOF/BCFK) contribution to the "emergency" in Korea.