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Monday, Mar. 30, 1942

THE PRESS: Correspondents Down Under

The biggest A.E.F. of newsmen in World War II last week went into action in Australia.

Its components: 34 uniformed newsmen and photographers who arrived with a big convoy of U.S. troops, plus such veterans of the Battles of Java and Singapore as A.P.'s C. Yates McDaniel, U.P.'s Harold Guard, the Chicago Daily News's much machine-gunned George Weller a total of over two dozen correspondents, photographers, broadcasters, newsreelmen.

The first action of the newcomers was a battle with censorship. The uniformed, Army-regulated correspondents, who had waited weeks in Washington for credentials, were forbidden to send stories until USAFA headquarters, several hundred miles away, re-accredited them. First they were scooped on the news of the arrival of U.S. troops in Australia when the Chicago Sun's Edward Angly, who arrived on an earlier convoy, went to a neighboring town and filed a dispatch which the censor let slip past.

Then, tipped off that big news was coming, the correspondents guessed rightly at MacArthur's arrival, but were forbidden to tell how he got there. So they were scooped again by the Chicago Sim's H. R. Knickerbocker and the New York Herald Tribune's Allen Raymond, who presumably had not heard that details of MacArthur's trip were off the record.

General MacArthur, who has no mania for secrecy, soon dynamited the worst censorship log jams. Then the correspondents were left to fight the battle of transmission. Before the war the South Pacific had eight cables, several big radio stations. Only two cables remain, one of them a slow, alternate route around Africa. These puny facilities are jammed by Government priority messages; correspondents sometimes have to wait in line for as many as 400 Government code messages.

The correspondents' third battle was coverage. Australia is roughly the size of the U.S., and action is scattered around much of its frontier. Moreover, although Canberra is technically the capital, the Cabinet just as often meets in Melbourne or Sydney, and communiqués are issued all over the lot.

At week's end most of the correspondents, well schooled in home-is-where-you-hang-your-hat, had got themselves settled in two "certain hotels" in the "same city," were scouting around for the most likely action spots.

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