



# War and lasting change: The battle for survival on the provincial newspaper front

By Rod Kirkpatrick

Abstract

**The first World War radically changed the economic basis of newspapers and made a major impact on journalistic techniques.** - Henry Mayer, *The Press in Australia* (1964), p.28.

The Second World War also had a big impact on the future of newspapers in Australia, accelerating the amalgamation of titles and the concentration of ownership (e.g. viz. Mayer, p.31). In addition, newsprint rationing, better newspaper design and the demand for war news combined to complete the transition of the front-page from advertising to news. What was the full impact on newspapers of this second world conflict? This case study sets out to explore the changes wrought in the Australian provincial daily press through a comparative study of the impact of World War II on three regional daily newspapers from different states. The author finds that the main effects on newspapers caused by World War II resulted from the rationing of newsprint. The newsprint restrictions led to reduced paging, with significantly less space for advertising and so reduced revenues. Another result was that the main news of the day shifted on to the front page and gained an unshakeable hold there.) Newswriting became more concise, and, more hurried, with accuracy suffering. Despite the thinner editions, the demand for war news led to significant increases in circulation. The economic pressures led to the closure of 64 provincial newspapers in five States during the first four years of the war.

This paper sets out to explore the impact of World War II on the Australian provincial daily press through a case study of three newspapers, one from each of the east-coast mainland states: the *Ballarat Courier*, Victoria; the *Newcastle Morning Herald*, New South Wales; and the *Morning Bulletin*, Rockhampton, Queensland. Among the effects to be explored are newspaper paging (size of editions) and format, cover prices, volumes and style of editorial content, competition, profitability and circulation. For each newspaper title, the information - and its reliability - on any one of these effects varies. To begin, the study and each of the papers are placed in a brief historical context.

Wars have traditionally been a trigger either for the emergence of newspapers or for significant change in their industry. The beginnings in England of what we now call newspapers were connected with a long, drawn-out series of European conflicts known as the Thirty Years War. A series of weekly news books giving accounts of the battles began appearing in 1620 (Smith 1970, p.10). Wars impacted greatly on politics and trade and so literate traders and the wealthy eagerly devoured news of the progress of the battles in any war. In the United States, the Civil War accelerated a change in the style of journalism – a shift towards

much greater use of reporters. Until that war, political organs had dominated journalism. During the Civil War, readers wanted more news from the battlefields, not more political opinions and essays. Reporters, primarily from newspapers in the North, roamed the battlefields, “wrote about what they saw and heard, and schemed to get their stories back to their offices by telegraph or train”. Circulations soared, and editors hired more reporters after the war, using them to obtain other types of stories (Fedler 2000, p.4). For the Australian newspaper industry, World War I radically changed the economic basis of operations and made a major impact on journalistic techniques. Supplies of newsprint fell while prices rose by 600 per cent between July 1914 and July 1921. Cable charges also jumped 600 per cent. While actual sales of papers increased, advertising revenue tended to fall (Mayer 1968, p.28). During the war, both the volume of news and the hunger for detailed news from the front grew. Because the competition to be first in publishing the news increased, many messages that would ordinarily have been sent at standard rates were now sent at urgent rates. One result was a terser journalism. Proprietors, faced with rising costs and increased sales, cut the size of newspapers. Terseness became a necessity, not an experiment. What Sir Keith Murdoch told his staff in an office memorandum a little later was already becoming the order of the day: ‘Always the need will be for condensation – all the news pointed, clear, terse – never an unnecessary word’ (Mayer 1968, pp.28-29).

When World War II began in September 1939, there had been plenty of warning. Great Britain had tried ‘over and over again’ to find a peaceful way out of ‘the differences between ourselves and those now our enemies’, as King George VI put it. And, as a result of Great Britain’s declaration of war on Germany, ‘Australia is also at war’, as Prime Minister Menzies said (quoted in *Ballarat Courier* 1939a). With the lessons of the first world conflict still fresh, Australian newspaper proprietors had no excuses if they had not prepared for war by stocking up on newsprint and maintaining a tight rein on finances. Yet, preparations did not necessarily provide great benefit. In 1938, with war looming, newsprint was such a crucial issue that at the *Maryborough Chronicle*, Queensland, the proprietor, the Dunn family, used all its surplus cash to build up a stockpile only to find that once the war began, the size of stockpiles was regulated (Maryborough Newspaper Co minutes 1938). At the Rockhampton Newspaper Company, the board (all members of the Dunn family) decided on 30 November 1938 ‘in view of world conditions’ to carry eight to nine months of newsprint stocks in future, instead of the usual six months (Rockhampton Newspaper Co minutes 1938). Repeated cuts in the quantities of available newsprint forced newspapers to cut edition sizes during the war, as will be shown. For newspapers, World War II was not simply a re-run of World War I. The ‘war to end all wars’, of 1914-18, was the end of a boom in newspaper publication in Australia, in terms of the multiplicity of titles. It signalled the beginning of a serious review of the highly competitive newspaper situation in many provincial cities and towns. For example, amalgamations were encouraged by the New South Wales Country Press Association. Between the two wars, significant turning points for newspapers and Australian society as a whole were the advent of radio broadcasting in Australia in the 1920s, the emergence of the Australian Broadcasting Commission in 1932, and the Great Depression of 1929-32, with lingering effects for some years afterwards. Amalgamations gathered momentum during these years as the number of newspaper titles dwindled. Among the amalgamations were the following in Queensland and New South Wales: the two tri-weeklies at Warwick merged in 1919 to become the *Warwick Daily News*; the two dailies at Toowoomba merged in 1922 to become the *Toowoomba Chronicle and Darling Downs Gazette*; the daily *Cootamundra Herald* absorbed the town’s *Daily News* in 1928; and in Goulburn in 1927 the *Evening Penny Post* absorbed the daily *Southern Morning Herald* and itself became a daily (Kirkpatrick 1984, pp.237-238; and 2000, p.191).

## Historical background

Firstly to broad context. During the 1940s interest in public opinion grew noticeably worldwide. The rise of totalitarian regimes and their use of propaganda techniques intensified anxiety about the anti-democratic potential of modern public communication. At the same time it was argued that improved public opinion

monitoring was necessary for a functioning democracy. The dependence of newspapers, radio and other emerging media on advertising and the apparently manipulative intent behind the gathering of information also focused attention on the public opinion industry (Osborne & Lewis 1995, p.65). In 1939, the chairman of the Herald and Weekly Times Ltd (HWT), Sir Keith Murdoch, approved a memo suggesting his newspaper group commission and publish its own public opinion polls. Roy Morgan, then a 31-year-old finance journalist with the group's flagship, the *Herald*, was sent to the United States to study the polling method pioneered there by George Gallup. When Morgan returned, he conducted the first Australian poll using recognisably modern methods of random sampling. It found 59 per cent of respondents favoured equal pay for women and was published in the *Herald* on 4 October 1941. The Morgan-HWT partnership, born in 1941, monopolised Australian public opinion polling for more than 30 years, producing news stories on some 3,500 poll questions (Mills in Curthoys & Schultz 1999, p.205). In the view of Osborne and Lewis (1995, p.65), the establishment of the Australian Public Opinion Poll (Gallup) by the Roy Morgan Research Centre Pty. Ltd. signalled a deepening commercial and political interest in more efficient methods of understanding and managing mass society. It is against this backdrop that short pen pictures of the history of each of the three case-study dailies - each instruments of communicating public opinion within their provincial communities - are presented.

Newspaper publication began on the goldfields of Ballarat, north-west of Melbourne, possibly in September 1853, although no issues of the paper projected for publication then - the *Banner* - have been located. The *Ballarat Times* definitely began on 4 March 1854 and the *Ballarat Star* on 22 September 1855. Eight of the 10 papers started in the town in the 1850s survived only a few months or a few years. The *Evening Post* was established on 25 May 1863 as Ballarat's first evening paper and its first penny paper (Herrin 2000, pp.9, 12, 15 and 17). When the *Ballarat Courier* was established, as a daily, on 10 June 1867, it was possibly the 16th or 17th title to be established in the town (Morrison 1991, Appendix 1, pp.4-6). At the end of the 1860s and into the 1870s, Ballarat had four daily newspapers, but the most successful in the nineteenth century were the *Star*, the *Courier* and the *Evening Post* (Morrison 1991, p.122; Herrin 2000, p.91; *William Caxton* 1871, pp.15-16). Two months after the *Evening Post* closed on 8 December 1894, the *Evening Echo* began publication - on 12 February 1895 (Herrin 2000, pp.22, 24). On 15 September 1924, the *Courier* incorporated the daily *Star* but still faced daily competition until 6 March 1929 from the *Evening Echo*, whose motto was 'Fearless, Truthful and Just'. The *Echo* gave equipment breakdowns ("very bad breakages of teeth in the main driving wheels" of the press) and the inability to obtain replacement parts as the reason for suspending publication (*Ballarat Courier* 1924; *Evening Echo* 1929a, 1929b, 1929c and 1929d). Even as the *Echo* was in its brief dying throes, *The Mail* emerged, from the same building - with the *Echo's* printer and publisher, William Herbert Newbery, as proprietor - as a morning daily, on Monday, 4 March 1929. It incorporated the *Evening Echo* from the *Mail's* fourth issue, 7 March. This incorporation was tentative initially - because the *Echo* was still expected to resume publication if parts could be obtained - but it was confirmed on 23 March. Meanwhile, *The Mail* shifted to the evening slot on 21 March. The *Courier* and *The Mail* competed against one another throughout World War II and it was not until February 1966 that *The Mail* ceased publication (*The Mail* 1929a, 1929b, 1929c, 1929d and 1966).

At Newcastle, newspaper publication began on 14 July 1855 with the appearance of the *Newcastle Telegraph*, but Newcastle was a convict town at the mouth of the Hunter River and Maitland and Morpeth were more prosperous centers - comprising free citizens - upstream. The *Newcastle Chronicle* began publication on 28 August 1858 and had various competitors during the 1860s until the *Newcastle Pilot* began publication on 6 September 1867. The *Pilot* became the first Newcastle daily, on 1 June 1874. By then, the *Miners' Advocate and Northumberland Recorder*, had been launched at Wallsend - on 21 February 1873. The owners shifted it to Newcastle three years later and launched straight into daily publication as the *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners Advocate*. It began publication on 3 April 1876. Three months later the *Herald* absorbed the Newcastle 'survivor', the *Chronicle*, and three years later its daily rival, the *Pilot*, closed. A string of newspaper

publishers attempted daily publication in Newcastle but the only one to throw out a serious challenge to the *Herald* was the *Newcastle Sun*, established in 1918 and bought by the *Herald* in 1936 (Kirkpatrick 2000, pp.55-57 and 339-340).

At Rockhampton, the *Rockhampton Bulletin* - it became the *Morning Bulletin* in 1878 - appeared on 9 July 1861 and was the first newspaper published in the town on the banks of the Fitzroy and on the Tropic of Capricorn. From 3 January 1863 it faced competition from the *Northern Argus*, which, through various title changes, continued publication for 78 years (Kirkpatrick 1984, pp.42-44). The *Bulletin* became a daily on 1 January 1873 and the *Argus* followed suit two years later. They continued as daily rivals until the junior title, by then called the *Evening News*, ceased publication in 1941, although the two papers had been in the one ownership stable since 1929. Among the significant number of other Rockhampton titles over the years were two weeklies published by the two dailies: *The Capricornian*, established in 1875 by the *Bulletin*, and *The Artesian*, established in 1919 by the *Evening News*. They merged to become the *Central Queensland Herald* when the Dunn family, owners of the *Bulletin*, bought the *News* in 1929 (Kirkpatrick 1984, pp.105, 281, 329-330).

## Changes during World War II

The biggest and most obvious changes to newspapers during World War II (hereafter called the war) arose from the rationing of newsprint. The need to conserve shipping space and foreign exchange forced the Federal Government to ration the importing of newsprint (Griffen-Foley 2000, p.117). This affected the size of the papers (paging), format (some newspapers obtained approval to use narrower columns), demands on editorial, advertising and production staff, the advertising revenue and profitability. Circulation was the one area where the results were generally positive, so great was the demand for war news. When the *Newcastle Morning Herald* increased its cover price from one-and-a-half-pence (1\_d) to twopence (2d) on 5 February 1940, it provided an insight into the immediate impact of newsprint rationing. The *Herald* said that in January 1937 the average cost of 'newsprint into store' was £12 15s. per ton. This had risen to £17 16s. by the beginning of the war and soon went considerably higher.

War conditions caused depreciation in sterling and Australian currencies compared with the dollar and substantial increases in freights and war risk insurance. There was, moreover, a rise in overseas prices of newsprint. The effect has been to raise the cost into store of recent shipments still further to £21 17s. (up 71pc on 1937) and shipments now on order are costing more than this to land in Australia. Newspapers are confronted with other increases in costs, notably the cost of cables, and with reduction in revenue on account of heavy decline in the volume of advertising.

This had left the *Herald* with no alternative but to increase its cover price after having obtained the approval of the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner. The *Herald* mentioned that for many years the London *Times*, and the daily papers in Brisbane, Perth, Hobart and Launceston, and the leading New Zealand papers had been 2d. Softening the blow, the *Herald* announced some 'important new features', including the serialisation of Lieutenant-Commander Kenneth Edwards' book, *We Dive at Dawn* (about the risks which the British submarine service 'is running daily in the present war'); the enlarging of the women's pages to carry a wide variety of features of interest to 'maid and matron, to housewife and mother'; and the introduction of a section which the children will 'cherish as their own corner' (*Newcastle Morning Herald* 1940).

To assess the impact of newsprint rationing, the author studied the files of each of the three dailies for the first full week in September for the years 1939 to 1944 and the first full week in June 1945. This provided an

indication of the average weekly paging numbers throughout the war (see Tables 1, 2 and 3). At its lowest point during the period surveyed, the *Ballarat Courier's* paging was 55.17 per cent smaller than its September 1939 paging: 26 pages a week in September 1942 compared with 58 in 1939 (see Table 1). The *Courier's* paging climbed slightly to 30 in 1943 and a little more to 36 in 1944. It changed format from broadsheet to tabloid on 18 December 1944 - abbreviating its title to *The Courier* - and the broadsheet equivalent was 38 pages in June 1945 (*Courier* 1944). Meanwhile, Ballarat's other daily, *The Mail*, appeared as a four-pager throughout the war years during the surveyed periods: that is 24 pages a week (Hogan 2000). The *Newcastle Morning Herald's* paging fell by 61.07 per cent between 1939 (94 pages) and September 1943 (36), its lowest point (see Table 2). The *Herald* stayed around the thirties or low forties in paging during 1942, 1943 and 1944. At Rockhampton, the *Morning Bulletin's* paging fell by 60.47 per cent between 1939 (86) and 1943 (34), its lowest point (see Table 3).

### The impact on editorial content

The reduction in paging had a significant impact on editorial content and presentation. For the *Newcastle Morning Herald* and Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin* it meant a change to using the front page as a news page, from 30 June 1941 for the *Herald* and from 19 October 1942 for the *Bulletin*. The *Ballarat Courier* had already adopted Page 1 as a news page by September 1939. At Ballarat, weekday issues of the *Courier* were down to four pages in 1943 for the first time since the paper's very early years. In 1942 the width of the masthead had been reduced to four columns, leaving additional space for news at the heads of the other three or four columns. Most special features were discontinued, but the crossword competition was revived for a time to raise funds for Red Cross and the Australian Comforts Fund (Clarke 1992, p.44). In 1943 a new weekly single column feature appeared under the heading of the 'Ballarat Courier News Service'. This was a weekly summary of news specially prepared to induce readers to supply items of news such as letters to men in the forces, and included items of general, local and sporting interest and a list of deaths recorded during the past week in the local columns. Despite the space crisis, however, Adela's 'Topics for Women' continued to appear each Thursday and Saturday. On the back page each Tuesday was the popular Children's Page, which included 'Comrades' Corner'.

**Table 1**  
*Ballarat Courier (Victoria)*

Day	Paging Sept 1939	Paging Sept 1940	Paging Sept 1941	Paging Sept 1942	Paging Sept 1943	Paging Sept 1944	Paging June 1945
Monday	8	6	6	4	4	4	4
Tuesday	8	6	6	4	4	6	6
Wednesday	10	8	8	4	4	6	6
Thursday	8	8	6	4	6	6	6
Friday	8	6	6	4	4	4	6
Saturday	16	12	10	6	8	10	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>38*</b>

\* The *Ballarat Courier* changed from broadsheet to tabloid format on 18 December 1944. Hence the 1945 paging figures in Table 1 have been halved to enable an equivalent comparison to be made with the previous years' figures.

**Table 2***Newcastle Morning Herald (New South Wales)*

Day	Paging Sept 1939	Paging Sept 1940	Paging Sept 1941	Paging Sept 1942
<b>Paging Sept 1943</b>				
<b>Paging Sept 1944</b>				
<b>Paging June 1945</b>				
Monday	12	8	6	6
Tuesday	12	8	6	6
Wednesday	14	10	8	6
Thursday	16	12	8	6
Friday	20	20	14	8
Saturday	20	12	10	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>38</b>

**Table 3***Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton (Queensland)*

Day	Paging Sept 1939	Paging Sept 1940	Paging Sept 1941	Paging Sept 1942
<b>Paging Sept 1943</b>				
<b>Paging Sept 1944</b>				
<b>Paging June 1945</b>				
Monday	14	10	8	6
Tuesday	14	10	8	6
Wednesday	16	10	8	6
Thursday	14	10	8	6
Friday	14	12	10	8
Saturday	14	12	8	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>40</b>

As 1943 progressed, and the war news became more hopeful, the *Courier's* board began to look forward to a future in which efforts would be needed to increase circulation to make up the ground lost during the past years. The appointment of an additional worker to the process department was proposed, with a view to increasing the use of illustrations, and the purchase of a car to transport a photographer and reporter was also considered desirable. The managing director told the board he was convinced that figures could be improved if the paper were presented in tabloid form, carrying local and overseas illustrations (Clarke 1992, p.45). Modern typesetting machines were ordered to enable advertisements to be made more attractive. It was not until 18 December 1944 (*Courier* 1944a, p.3) that the tabloid format began. It was presented to the public as being good for them.

The cardinal purpose in making the change was to give the public better service. This will be the goal, and to its attainment all energies will be directed. Again, it has a definite advantage, making possible a more attractive presentation of news. With additional pages, it will be possible to make freer use of illustrations than was possible with the fewer pages of a broadsheet.

Congratulations on the new format poured into the *Courier* office. Sales soared, reaching a new high. 'The tabloid had made good. Ballarat was proud of it' (*Courier* 1944b, p.2).

At the *Newcastle Morning Herald*, newsprint rationing during World War II had an enduring impact on editorial style. Writing had to become much more concise. Eric Knight Lingard (1983), as chief sub-editor, has written that he was given the task of reducing the weekly paging of the *Herald* from 108 to 34. This allowed for four pages Mondays to Wednesdays, six pages on Thursdays and Fridays and 10 on Saturday. Lingard (1982) said this continued until 1946. 'The *Herald* was reduced to its chassis, with lasting results editorially.' One was that

it 'never recovered pre-war accuracy'. The *Herald* changed imperceptibly, column by column, page by page, Lingard wrote later. The main news was on the right-hand middle page (generally Page 7).

The front page was shared by single-column advertisements for city retailers. They were precious. The first column of the front page was taken for 'News of the Day'. It was one of the most acceptable features ever, with a summary of each news item in the paper. Busy men could be informed within a minute or so... Old-style captions were replaced, double-column headings introduced (Lingard 1983).

When the *Herald* published news on Page 1 from 30 June 1941, the reaction could be summed up as suspiciously positive. D. Watkins, MHR, said: 'It was rather a shock to old friends of the paper to see news on the front page. We had come to regard the sober exterior as evidence of its unchanging solidity, but I am sure that ... the best traditions of the *Herald* will be maintained.' The president of Newcastle Chamber of Commerce, T. Armstrong, MLC, said: 'The change in the *Herald* after so many years makes us realise the great sacrifices the war is imposing on the newspaper industry.' Dora Sparke, president of the Victoria League: 'I like it enormously. News on the front page is an enormous improvement. I always went headlong for London papers with news on the front page.' Secretary of the Northern Miners' Federation, Mr J.B. Simpson: 'I hope that the change does not mean that the paper will have to cut down on its industrial news.' The editor, C. Sligo, said in a footnote: '[The *Herald*] assures Mr Simpson that [it] will continue to be also the "Miners' Advocate".'] (*Newcastle Morning Herald* 1941a and 1941b). Only a week later, the *Herald's* proprietors (1941c) felt that they owed readers 'an explanation of the contraction of this issue to six pages'.

The new and drastic restrictions imposed by the Federal Government on the use of newsprint came into operation last week, but this is the first full week of the restrictions and the *Herald*, in common with all other newspapers in Australia, is compelled to cut its size according to its ration. It has no option. The Department of Trade and Customs has fixed the number of pages it may print each week - precisely half the number published in an average week in 1938-39. On some of the metropolitan papers the cut ranged up to 60 per cent.

The proprietors made it their first concern to allocate sufficient space for news, though this had necessitated a substantial sacrifice of advertising revenue. Strict limits were placed upon the volume of advertising that would be accepted for any issue. Display advertising was rationed strictly so that no advertiser would gain an advantage over others. Nevertheless, it was impossible under the new conditions to give as much space to news, features and special articles as formerly.

Reports will be briefer, sporting results as is evident in this issue will be given in more condensed form and less important detail will be pruned in every department. A process of careful sifting and selection of news, combined with the space-saving changes in form which have been so generously received by the public, will, it is confidently hoped, permit a traditionally wide news cover to be maintained unimpaired and make for a sharper daily picture of the war, of world events, and of all that passes of Australian or district interest.

During the war, the Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin* discontinued such features as its serial (in September 1939 it was 'The Man in Grey' by Baroness Orczy), Ethel Buzacott's 'A Page for Women', 'The Girls' Club', 'Children's Corner' by 'Uncle Sam' (with its competitions and cartoons and poems and letters), and 'Motor Notes' by 'Radiator' and slashed the size of the 'Entertainments' items and contributions to columns such as 'Town and Country Social News' and 'Country News' (*Morning Bulletin* 1939 and 1943). News items were crammed into small holes: 25 news items cluttered Page 4 of a six-page issue on 5 October 1942.

One correspondent (“J.H.W.”) was bluntly informed in the editorial columns: ‘Newsprint limitations make impossible the use of articles of this nature and length’ (*Morning Bulletin* 1941). Advertisements suffered from the same sense of cramming as news. Wanted ads for second-hand bicycles appeared cheek by jowl with for-sale ads for cockroach paste and ads for the movies at the Earls Court and Liberty Theatres. Yet the *Bulletin* was never in danger of running out of newsprint. Over nearly three decades (1926-55) and encompassing such crises as depression, a world war and shipping strikes, Rockhampton general manager Len Cran maintained a stockpile of newsprint for the *Morning Bulletin* and, from 1929-41, the *Evening News* so well that not only was no issue of the two titles - as well as the company’s weekly paper - missed, but also, during the war, he was able to help out other papers, such as *The Courier-Mail* (Cran 1992; *Morning Bulletin* 1955). The Rockhampton directors were told in August 1940 that ‘prices of newsprint and all other materials had increased sharply and unsettled conditions throughout the world had seriously affected the regular flow of business’ (Rockhampton Newspaper Co 1940a). It was unlikely the ‘present scale of profits’ would continue, because of newsprint rationing, smaller papers and limits on how much advertising could be accepted. By the end of 1940 Cran had arranged a long-term newsprint order, split equally between Gordon & Gotch and Bowaters, covering supplies from July 1941 till December 1945 (Rockhampton Newspaper Co 1940b).

War hammered the final nail in the coffin of the *Evening News*, which had been struggling financial for eight years. The Dunn family closed the *News* -a direct descendant of Rockhampton’s second newspaper, the *Northern Argus* - on 31 July 1941 and incorporated it in the *Morning Bulletin* title. Before doing so, the Dunns applied to the Comptroller of Customs for sufficient newsprint to allow two pages to be included in the *Morning Bulletin* each week. These were to comprise the *Evening News* section of the *Morning Bulletin* and the idea was to name-protect the investment and preserve the name connection. With the closure of the *News*, eight men and a woman lost their jobs. [Only a few weeks earlier three men were dismissed when the size of the *Morning Bulletin* and the weekly *Central Queensland Herald* was reduced.] The Dunns retained the services of George Westacott, the former *Evening News* editor, with his duties to consist of ‘leader writing (three per week), supplying articles of general interest and in other directions in which he has already proved valuable’. Outsiders contributing leading articles were thanked for their assistance and advised that for the time being ‘present arrangements must be terminated’ (Rockhampton Newspaper Co 1941a and 1941b). Despite the closure of the *News*, the Rockhampton company announced a profit of £1,000 more than the previous year, a result which was ‘surprisingly good’. The year had been one of considerable difficulty and anxiety and both newsprint and petrol supplies were still a worry. A dividend of £4,000 was declared for the year (Rockhampton Newspaper Co 1941b).

Possibly no one bolstered the morale of the Rockhampton community during the war so much as did George Westacott, mentioned above. His column in the *Morning Bulletin* provided that level of whimsy and incisiveness in the simplest of styles that for many locals it was the first part of the paper they wanted to read. He introduced the column, generally called ‘Topics of the Day’, on 5 October 1922 when working for the *Evening News* and wrote it, or variations of it, until his death fifty-four years later. In his light, semi-satirical style he poked fun at local authority, politicians and pompous individuals, usually disguising his sting with subtle humour. One of his protégés, A.T. (Bert) Hinchliffe, who became the editor of *The Chronicle*, Toowoomba, from 1951-1969, said Westacott’s “Topics” was superb and had a light, humorous, satirical touch and a graceful turn of phrase. Denis Butler, later the chief sub editor of the *Newcastle Herald*, said: ‘If ever there was a bloke who managed to touch the funnybone of a whole city, it was George Westacott.’ Here is an example from during the war (‘Topics of the Day’ 1942):

Well, how are we going with the Austerity Campaign! Pretty well, I hope. Mr Makin, the Federal Minister, has given a noble lead in austerity by jettisoning a round of inspections of munitions

annexes, thereby saving goodness knows how much manpower that would have gone to washing up glasses, cuttings sandwiches, and all that kind of thing, to say nothing of the time and labour taken up consuming same. That is a Design for Living that everyone should be able to follow, if we only make up our minds to live the Spartan Life. So let us all follow Mr Makin and intimate to our well wishers that on no account will we attend any further smoke concerts or presentations of wallets of notes arranged in our honour.

The end of “hostilities” for the military - in May 1945 in the European conflict and in August 1945 in the Japanese conflict - did not signal an immediate return to pre-war conditions for newspapers. Newsprint shortages continued for a couple of years and, as the *Morning Bulletin* noted, even though increased advertising was available, it was no advantage if the paper was not available on which to print extra ads. Another problem created by the newsprint shortage was that when Rockhampton employees who had been away on war service returned, there was difficulty in making full use of them (Rockhampton Newspaper Co 1945). Yet a universal complaint by country newspaper proprietors early in the war was that “irreplaceable employees of long standing had enlisted” (Thomas 2001).

On the national scene, despite the savage effect of newsprint rationing, no provincial paper had missed publication because of a newsprint shortage, according to a report presented to the Committee of Management of the Australian Provincial Press Association in November 1943. That was the good news. The bad news was that 12 per cent of Australian provincial newspapers being published at the beginning of the war had ceased publication during the four years since. These figures were for all States except Western Australia, for which figures were not available. Sixty-four papers had ceased publication, with the breakdown as follows: NSW 17 (four published biweekly, 13 weekly), Victoria 19 (all weekly), Queensland 20 (two daily, one triweekly, one biweekly, 16 weekly), South Australia seven (all weekly), and Tasmania one (biweekly). In all 55 weeklies had closed, six biweeklies, one triweekly and two dailies - the *Evening News*, Rockhampton, and the *Evening Star*, Townsville (*Newspaper News* 1943). In NSW, some of the papers that closed during the war resumed publication after the war - for example, in 1946, the *Mullumbimby Star*, the *Mungindi Advocate*, and the *Tumbarumba Times* (*Press Progress* 1946, 51). The end of the war brought a new spate of amalgamations in NSW: the two Orange tri-weeklies amalgamated to become the *Central Western Daily* on 1 October 1945 and other amalgamations occurred at Bellingen, Harden-Murrumburrah, Young, Deniliquin and Kiama in the following two years.

### Competition and circulation

As indicated earlier, Ballarat was the only one of the three cities where fully-fledged daily competition existed during the war. The *Courier* and the *Mail* competed throughout the war, and, indeed, until 1966. At Newcastle, the *Herald* owned the evening *Sun*, and at Rockhampton the *Morning Bulletin* owned the *Evening News* and closed it in July 1941. These factors should be taken into account when the circulation figures for the three papers under consideration are examined (see Table 4). The Audit Bureau’s figures for provincial dailies date only from 1937-38 and the *Ballarat Courier* did not join until 1941. Figures are not available for the *Ballarat Mail* and the Rockhampton *Evening News*, but they are for the *Newcastle Sun*. The *Ballarat Courier*’s circulation rose by 28.57 per cent (2,450 sales) from the first applicable audit for this study, in 1941, to September 1945. The *Newcastle Morning Herald*’s circulation rose by 29.28 per cent (8,639 sales) in the six years from September 1939, while the *Newcastle Sun*’s circulation rose by 56.89 per cent (10,214 sales). The daily sales of the two Newcastle titles rose by 39.73 per cent, from 47,458 in 1939 to 66,311 in 1945. The Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin*’s circulation rose by 30.07 per cent (2,856 sales).

**Table 4**  
**Circulation of four provincials during World War II**

Circulation for six months to:		<i>Ballarat Courier</i>	<i>Newcastle Morning Herald</i>	<i>Newcastle Sun</i>
<i>Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton</i>				
30 September 1939	n.a.	29,504	17,954	9,499
30 September 1940	n.a.	29,086	17,642	9,992
30 September 1941	8,575	30,874	18,983	10,047
30 September 1942	9,061	32,936	21,100	10,611
30 September 1943	9,659	34,497	22,123	10,976
30 September 1944	10,859	36,639	24,952	11,890
30 September 1945	11,025	38,143	28,168	12,355

### Conclusion

This case study (see Table 5 for a comparison between the three titles) suggests that the main effects on newspapers caused by World War II resulted from the rationing of newsprint. The newsprint restrictions led to reduced paging, with significantly less space for advertising and so reduced revenues. This was offset in some instances by smaller staffs, with male employees volunteering for war service. Another result was that - at Newcastle and Rockhampton, for instance - the main news of the day shifted on to the front page and gained an unshakeable hold there. (Even the staid *Sydney Morning Herald* put news on Page 1 from 15 April 1944 [Souter 1981, p.596].) At Ballarat, the *Courier* already had front-page news when the war began, but it changed from a broadsheet to a tabloid format in December 1944. Newswriting became more concise, and, more hurried, with accuracy suffering, as Eric Lingard noted in Newcastle. Despite the thinner editions, the demand for war news led to significant increases in circulation - close to 30 per cent for each of the case-study newspapers. The economic pressures led to the closure of 64 provincial newspapers in five States during the first four years of the war. In Queensland, two of these closures were dailies, including the *Evening News*, Rockhampton. Many regular pre-war features disappeared from the case-study newspapers during the war and, if resumed, never quite regained the voluminous space and profuse style that they had enjoyed until 1939. Cover prices of newspapers generally rose little: only one of the case-study papers increased its price. With the benefit of hindsight, it can be seen that World War II hastened changes, some of them overdue, in newspapers, thus preparing them for the competition they were soon to face from television - from 1956 in Sydney and Melbourne and over the next half a dozen years or so in other capitals and in the provinces.

**Table 5**  
**Comparison table for dailies in three provincial cities during World War II**

Feature	<i>Ballarat Courier</i>	<i>Newcastle Morning Herald</i>	<i>Morning Bulletin, Rockhampton</i>
Year of establishment	1867	1876	1861
Cover price during war		1_d	1_d in 1939; 2d 1940-45
News dominant on Page 1		1939-45	From 30 June 1941
Format	Broadsheet 1939-44; tabloid from 18 Dec 1944	Broadsheet	Broadsheet
Weekly paging in September 1939	58	98	86
Lowest weekly paging for periods surveyed during war	34 (in Sept 1943)	26 (in Sept 1942)	36 (in Sept 1943)

<b>Circulation for six months to Sept 1939</b>	n.a.	29,504	9,499
<b>Circulation for six months to Sept 1945</b>	11,025	38,143	12,355
<b>Competitive situation</b>	Opposing daily throughout war		Another daily, but owned by <i>Herald</i>
	Another daily (until 31 July 1941), but owned by <i>Bulletin</i>		

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