Australian Slang from WWII

U. S. troops discovered soon after the beginning of the Second World War that when it comes to slang, their Aussie comrades-in-arms could teach them something about slang (or jive talk, as it was then referred to). For the Australian language is next to the slangiest of all brands of English speech. Australia, like America, is a young country. Like America, it boasts a youthful defiance of established forms, a youthful itch for novelty. Growing in mind and mores, its tongue is supple and its wit keen. So its crooks and hobos, its cowboys and sports fans, collegiates and soldiers are feeding its language with striking and picturesque words and phrases, some old, others new.

Here is a composite lesson in the popular cant from down under, in the form of a fictitious news story in, say, a Melbourne paper:

Last night a *drogo* was walking his *Sheila* through the park when a corporal stepped up to him. "Hey, *sprog*," said the corporal, "how about us getting' another *cliner* and puttin' on a little *shivoo?*" *"Imshi,"* said the drogo. "You're *shikkered!"* Don't *chivvy* me," said the corporal. :I've only had a bit of *plonk*. Now I'm ready to *smooge*." "My Sheila," said the drogo, "isn't the smoogin' kind," whereupon he poked the corporal in the *boko*. At the police station . . . etc., etc.

Glossary: Drogo (a clumsy Australian insect) is a rookie. Sheila is a "babe." Sprog is one of inferior rank. Cliner is also a dame or jane; shivoo, a party. Imshi means scram; shikkered, drunk. Chivvy means lip or back talk. Plonk is cheap wine. To smooge is to pitch woo. Boko is nose. Some of the derivations are obscure. Imshi is Arabic, a reply to the beggar's cry of "Baksheesh!"

The drogo's blow might have made the corporal feel as if he'd been *stonkered* (struck by a shell). If his approach had been better he might have said to the rookie, "*I'll shout you*," meaning he'd set him up to a drink. They might have gone *whacks* (Dutch treat). If they had gotten together and found another *sninny* (girl), they might have had a *beano* (spread). Maybe neither had a *deener* (shilling) or even a *zack* (sixpence). Next morning the corporal no doubt had the *joes* (blues). He shouldn't have *magged* (run off at the mouth) so much. Otherwise they might have had a *ding dong* (swell) time.

Use frequency of the above terms varies, but one slang word used by all Australians at some time in their lives is the adjective *dinkum*. It means simply true. Thus a dinkum *bloke* (man) has its equivalent Americanism: "a real guy." A variant of dinkum is *dinkie*, which doesn't mean undersized as here, but cute or pretty. Based on dinkum is *dinkie-die* (true blue). Counterpart of "Dinkie-die Aussie" is "One Hundred Percent American." The *dinkum oil* is the honest-to-God truth, the lowdown. Dinkum is out of Old English dialect. It first was used in Australia in the phrase "an hour's hard dinkum" (work). It came to mean anything honest, genuine. *Yakka* is slang for hard work now. It was borrowed from the aborigines. Sometimes spelled yacker, it first showed up in Aussie speech in Queensland, about 1890.

Equal to dinkum in usage is *bonzer*, defined as an adjective expressing the superlative of excellence. Bonzer – Great!, Super! Variants still alive are *boshter* and *bosker*. Bonzer first appeared in the mid-19th century as bon or bons, probably from the Scottish bonny or French *bon*. In a hundred years many forms developed: bonter, bontager, bontogerino, bontosher. The American expression bonanza may have helped gel the term into bonzer. In the same category is *cobber*, or side-kick. It came from the

old Suffolk dialect verb "to cob", in other words to make a friendship, and appeared in print for the first time in Australia in1897.

Turn from boon companion to someone you don't like and he can be a *wowser*, a stuffed shirt, but particularly a bluenose. (In controversy now are the country's 300-year-old blue laws.) Wowser may come from the Anglo-Saxon *wissor* (teacher) but some Aussies say it stands for "We Only Want Social Evils Removed." Another term of opprobrium is *cow:* a thoroughly unworthy person, place, thing or circumstance. It's a cow of a day, if it storms.

An Aussie soldier goes to the races to bet on the *gee-gees*. A plug or a nag is a *moke*. A bronco is a *brumby*. The soldier may take some friends to the woods to boil the *billy* – a can in which Aussie picnickers make tea. Billy is a term from the back country or bush. As in the famous Australian folk song, *Waltzing Matilda*, the *swagman* (wayfarer) carries his billy and his *matilda* (bundle of personal effects). But when an Aussie *drops the bundle* he surrenders or gives up hope. When, like the corporal, he goes on a bender he is a *larrikin*.

In Australia *ta* is thanks, *ta ta* goodby. Yoohoo here is *Cooee* there. *Shandy* is a mixture of lemonade and light ale. As here, Japs are *Nips*, Italians are *dingbats or dagos*, *Germans are jerries or krauts*. The English are *pommies or limies*.

"Bloody" (origin unknown) is used oftener than dinkum in Australia. It's bloody this, bloody everything. The English are bloody pommies. But then, the nicest thing an Aussie can call you is a bloody fine bastard.