

***A CENTURY OF SERVICE:  
100 YEARS OF THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY***

***ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF ARMY HISTORY***

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There is a close and reciprocal relationship between armies and their histories that is not matched by other professions. Of course one can easily have an Army without having a written history of it. But consciously or unconsciously, armies draw their doctrine, organisations, training and ethos from past experience. And even if there is no detailed written history, ideas about doctrine, structure, training and ethos are drawn from collective and institutional memory. Anyone who has served in the Army will know that activities such as drill on the parade ground have their origin in the drill manoeuvres for the battlefields two centuries ago. History provides the spirit of armies and they cannot fight without it.

Soldiers, and particularly army commanders, know how much they rely on past experience. Field Marshal Helmuth von Moltke asserted that military history was 'the most effective means of teaching war during peace'.<sup>1</sup> But armies have not always treated history objectively. Sir Basil Liddell Hart noted that '[t]he discovery of uncomfortable facts had never been encouraged in armies, who treated their history as a sentimental treasure rather than a field of scientific research'.<sup>2</sup>

Military history is written not just to prepare armies for the next war or the next battle. Military history is important in the wider, non-military community, for it fulfils in society the same function as general history. Major General J.F.C. Fuller pondered the role of military history in society and concluded that, 'as it is not subalterns or generals who make wars, but governments and nations, unless the people as a whole have some understanding of what war meant in the past ages, their opinions on war . . . today will be purely alchemical'.<sup>3</sup>

This year's celebrations marking 100 years since Federation are also a celebration of the value of history, and demonstrate implicitly why it needs to be told well, with sensitivity to the past, and with understanding of what it means for the present and future. Likewise, the centenary of the formation of the Australian Army is also an occasion to reflect on how it has developed in that time, and what place it has in the future. The tools for that reflection are the 100 years of writing about the Australian Army.

Military history is one of the great intellectual disciplines, one that has produced many classic works of literature. These tell of the rise and fall of empires. They describe the powerful emotions of courage and cowardice. They recall the tragedies, and record the triumphs of the human spirit. They not only describe what happened and tell us why, but also bring alive the human drama.

Most of you will be aware of some of these great books, such as Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian Wars*. Many of you will also recall that in the aftermath of the humiliation of the Vietnam War, the military colleges in the United States required their officers to study Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* in order to formulate new doctrine to govern the conduct of war. Clausewitz's work is not, strictly speaking, military history, though his analysis draws on several centuries' worth of historical examples. Significantly, the forerunner of this requirement was the decision of the United States Naval War College in 1972 to put Thucydides onto its own curriculum. This history of a series of ancient wars waged by a single people was deemed the best tool for rediscovering conventional warfare and re-learning its fundamental premises, within the larger context of strategy.<sup>4</sup> Thus even ancient history has played a central role in preparing armed forces for future wars.

Military history and Army history are not the same thing. In Australia we have three military services. But Australia's military history has been dominated by the experiences of our Army. The achievements of Australian soldiers since the Gallipoli landing in 1915 have come to express in a special way what it means to be Australian. To most Australians, the Army—perhaps more so than the other Services—embodies the Anzac spirit.

It is often said that war, in which the Army has played the dominant role, has been a defining experience for Australia. The Australian Army was engaged in military operations or had forces stationed overseas for thirty-eight of its first seventy years. And the Australian Army has had its fair share of combat and, of course casualties—almost 60,000 killed in the First World War, and over 20,000 in the Second World War. We also lost almost 500 soldiers in Vietnam.

March 2001 is a significant milestone for reasons that go beyond the centenary. On 2 March 1971 an Australian infantry company stopped for the night among scattered jungle and bamboo clumps, just back from a paddy field in Phuoc Tuy Province. It was warm, humid and still with a half-moon light. An attack on the position by a Viet Cong sapper reconnaissance company that night brought the death of the last Australian Duntroon graduate to die in action.<sup>5</sup> Later in the year we lost the last National Servicemen in action. Despite the Army's operational deployments over the past ten years, it is thirty years since an Australian soldier was killed by enemy action. How much is the history of the Army in its first seventy years, with its many wars, different from that in its last 30 years of peace?

The written history of the Australian Army has provided Australia with some of its own great works of literature. Indeed there is probably no other institution that has had more written about it. In 1996 the late Syd Trigellis-Smith, Sergio Zampatti and Max Parsons published *Shaping History: A Bibliography of Australian Army Unit Histories including army formations, establishments, associated organisations and a selection of campaign and area studies*.<sup>6</sup> This bibliography lists 873 books about the Australian Army, and if the bibliography been published in 2001 the number would have passed 1000 books. Some of these are about some pretty esoteric stuff. One that really caught my eye was *Tassie's Fighting Pay Corps 1916-1991: 75 Years of Tasmanian History with the Royal Australian Pay Corps*, published in 1995. This is the first of a proposed six-volume history, a volume for each state. The bibliography did not cover biographies, autobiographies or personal reminiscences, and these surely must match the unit histories in number. We might laugh about the Pay Corps, but the stories of its members have just as legitimate a place in the Army's story as those of any other component of the Australian Army. Instead, we might look at such a work, and ask whether there is a distinctly Australian way of writing about war.

Before the First World War there was certainly no military history tradition in Australia. Like many other things, we drew our tradition from Britain, or more generally, from Europe. For the general reader there were tales of Empire, while specialists might read about the technicalities of the American Civil War or the Franco-Prussian War. The Australian colonists had had little experience of war, except perhaps the war with the Aboriginal population, and most white Australians did not count that as war.

The scale of action and the magnitude of injury and loss of life in the First World War demanded a new and different form of telling. The Australian official historian, C.E.W. Bean, came to his task familiar with the style of what was then traditional military history. But his unique approach to his history grew out of his personal experiences and his desire to tell his countrymen what their sons had achieved on the world stage—as individuals, as Australians and as the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). Bean accompanied the AIF throughout the war, witnessed many of the battles, knew most of the major people of the AIF, and recorded interviews with the participants.

Bean wrote six of the eight AIF volumes, the first of which was published in 1921 and the last in 1942. The official history provides a remarkably detailed account of the First AIF and is especially praiseworthy because Bean created the archive on which his books were drawn. It is both a memorial to those Bean called the 'great hearted men' who served, and a brilliant piece of history writing.<sup>7</sup> It is a record of service in that Bean set out to describe every action in which Australian soldiers were involved. Although the Bean volumes set the standard for Australian history writing, the volumes produced other outcomes. They confirmed the impression that the history of the AIF was really the history of the Army. This idea was to dominate Australian thinking about the Army for a generation.

The Army did little to change this impression. Some senior permanent officers, such as Brigadier General Blamey, seemed to disregard Bean's efforts, believing that the Official History was too detailed to be widely read, and that it was not particularly valuable to the military profession. On the latter score Blamey was wrong, but Bean needed to be looked upon almost as a primary resource, to be mined for relevant lessons, guidance and understanding. And there were few historians or Army officers that were inclined either to mine Bean, or to write their own accounts of how the Army was developing as an institution. There was no attempt actually to analyse Australia's operations during the war and to draw relevant conclusions about command, training, doctrine or technology. It is certainly true that Blamey, and other permanent officers such as White, Wynter and Sturdee, drew conclusions from their own experiences about the command of Australian forces in the First World War and they applied those lessons in the Second World War. But neither they nor others wrote much about it. Writing in 1934, Liddell Hart observed that military history had 'been left largely to soldiers, with unfortunate results'.<sup>8</sup> This was not the case in Australia between the wars when soldiers failed to contribute to military history.

One regular army officer who did not fit this mould was Lieutenant Colonel Horace Robertson who published history articles in several British military journals. His pamphlet *The First Forty Days* was written to support military history instruction at Duntroon and after the Second World War was published for wider circulation.<sup>9</sup>

Because Bean created the archive, other scholars were reluctant to tackle the war, believing that the story had already been told. And the volumes provided the underpinning for the Anzac legend that has become part of Australian life and character every since.

During the inter-war period other books were written about the Australian Army in the First World War, but they were either personal accounts, such as *The Desert Column* by Ion Idriess (1932), or unit histories written by former unit members.<sup>10</sup> These works too seemed to be designed to support the Anzac legend of mateship and sacrifice. No attempt was made to place Australia's war experience in the context of Australian history, although, to be fair, there were few books about Australian history, especially history since Federation.

One exception to the numerous books on the AIF was *Garrison Gunners*, by 'Fronsac' (1929), which described the role of coast defence gunners in Australia during the First World War.<sup>11</sup> It was one of the many reminders that there was more to Army service than service in the AIF. Another important contribution was a long report on the Army's activities between 1929 and 1939 by Lieutenant General Sir Carl Jess, who had been Adjutant General before the Second World War. In his preface Jess wrote:

Whilst actual methods of warfare may change, it can be assumed that the future of the Australian peace-time Army ... will include similar cycles of trials and tribulations as in the past, so that a record of this nature should provide ready solutions to many problems which otherwise could only be solved by again reverting to trial and error.<sup>12</sup>

The historiography of the Australian Army after the Second World War differed from that after the First in several ways. After the outbreak of the Second World War the Army established a section to collect and organise historical material. But the official historians did not work for the Services. The historical sections became little more than archive offices and lacked the expertise to write history. The comprehensive nature of the official histories seemed to obviate the need for more historical writing. One concession to history was the series of yearbooks produced for the Army from 1941 to 1950.<sup>13</sup> Although these generally contained personal interest articles, they also had articles describing the course of the war and, in the post-war editions, other military history articles. For example, *Stand Easy*, the 1945 edition, had seven articles on the operations from Bougainville to Borneo. The 1946 edition of *As You Were* carried an article on 'The Occupation Force in Japan'. There were also a few Public Relations booklets such as *Reconquest*, by Captain V.E. Acott, describing the Lae-Markham operation.<sup>14</sup>

The official history of Australia in the Second World War ran to twenty-two volumes, seven of which were devoted to the Army. The general editor, Gavin Long, wrote three of them. Just as the soldiers of the Second AIF saw themselves as inheriting the mantle of the First AIF, after the Second World War Australian military historians seemed to rely on the tradition established by Bean. Like the First World War volumes, the Second World War volumes tried to record every action in which Australian soldiers were involved. In some ways they go further towards telling the story of the Australian Army than the First World War official history. The changes in the nature of the war meant that Long and his fellow authors had to devote more space to issues of strategy, higher command and allied cooperation. Furthermore, the story did not just have to cover the Second AIF but also the militia forces that fought in the South-West Pacific Area. The civil volumes of the official history series, those covering the government and the people, the economy, and science and technology, were recognition that the war touched all parts of Australian society.

More than in the inter war period, the Second World War resulted in the publication of personal memoirs, ranging from the memoirs of generals such as H. Gordon Bennett (1944), to the experiences of soldiers such as Peter Ryan's *Fear Drive My Feet* (1959).<sup>15</sup> There were, of course, many unit histories. But unlike the earlier period, there were also books by journalists and war correspondents, which analysed campaigns and discussed important episodes in Army history. These included *Tobruk* by Chester Wilmot (1944), *Green Armour*, by Osmar White (1945), and *Retreat from Kokoda*, by Raymond Paull (1958).<sup>16</sup>

The official histories of Australia's involvement in the Korean War, in the Malayan Emergency, Confrontation and Vietnam never had the same impact on Australian military history as the earlier official histories. In the first place, the time gap between their publication and the end of the wars was much greater. The first volume of the First World War series appeared just three years after the end of the war. The first of the Second World War volumes appeared seven years after the end of the war. The first Korean War volume appeared 28 years later, and the first of the Vietnam volumes, 20 years later.

But the main reason for the reduction in the impact of the volumes was the blossoming of other military history writing in the 1970s. Part of the impetus came from within the Army. During the 1950s and 1960s there had been a limited attempt to foster military history through officer promotion examinations. To support those examinations, the editor of the *Australian Army Journal*, Lieutenant Colonel Eustice Graham Keogh, wrote numerous military history articles. He followed this with the publication between 1953 and 1965 of six campaign study books that are still quite valuable as overall accounts of the campaigns.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the good work of Keogh, it was not until the 1960s that considered military history articles started to appear in the *Journal*. Perhaps this was because of the encouragement of the new editor, A.J. Sweeting, who had taken over from Keogh in 1965. But even then there were very few articles by serving regular officers. There were several good reminiscences of the Second World War and two important articles by Generals Rowell and Beavis on wartime chiefs of staff, Sturdee and Northcott. Nevertheless, during this period the Army made no serious effort to encourage the writing of military history.

Although history had to be studied for promotion examinations, there was no incentive for officers to think more deeply about historical issues. Perhaps, however, as a result of the introduction of university level academic courses at the service officer colleges during the 1960s, it was realised that studying history was part of a broader educative process. Military history might provide important insight for policy-makers. And as Australian defence policy moved towards self reliance it became necessary to understand the peculiar nature of the Australian defence problem.

One *Army Journal* article in 1966, by Captain Robert O'Neill, was the forerunner of a new attitude to military history.<sup>18</sup> As a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University in the early 1960s he studied military history and published a highly regarded book on the German Army and the Nazi Party.<sup>19</sup> He later served in Vietnam and his book on 5 RAR, *Vietnam Task*, was one of the few histories of units in Vietnam, until recent years, to make a real contribution to military history.<sup>20</sup> The other Vietnam unit histories, written at the time by unit members, vary in quality, from a mere chronology in some cases to a picture book in others.

The real drive for writing military history within the Army came in the 1970s with the appearance of officers who had received academic training as historians. This began in 1964 with the introduction of degree-level courses at Duntroon, where lecturers such as Alec Hill and Professor Len Turner were important influences on the cadets who now studied military history as a proper academic discipline.

During the 1970s several Duntroon graduates continued postgraduate studies in history, and by the mid 1980s half a dozen or more Army officers had post-graduate degrees in history. Officers who had academic military history books published while still serving in the Army in the decade from 1979 to 1989 include John Blaxland, Bob Breen, Chris Coulthard-Clark, Bob Hall and Peter Pedersen. These books were read widely throughout the Army and indeed were well accepted by the public.<sup>21</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s there were very few historians who were actually paid by the Army to write books. Apart from Keogh, who was really the editor of the Army Journal, the first Army historian was Brigadier Maurice Austin, appointed about 1970, who wrote a book on the Army in Australia between 1840 and 1850.<sup>22</sup> Ian McNeill later joined the military history section and he wrote a book on the Training Team in Vietnam.<sup>23</sup> In due course, John Mordike succeeded McNeill, and his valuable study of the Army before the First World War was published in 1992.<sup>24</sup>

The development of military history in the Australian Army in the 1970s mirrored that in the wider academic community. It has sometimes been claimed that the Vietnam War made the study of military history unfashionable in the universities, and there is some truth in that claim. But an objective assessment shows that in the 1970s more books on Australian military history were published than in the previous seventy years.

Several reasons might be proposed for the academic community's discovery of military history. First, there was a developing interest in Australian history more generally. Second, the archival records that had been used exclusively by the official historians were opened to the public. Third, the Vietnam War brought home to slay the vital point that military affairs in a democracy, especially decisions to commit troops to overseas operations, were matters that concerned the whole population and deserved close examination. In short the old aphorism that 'war is too important to be left to the generals' was given a new twist. Military history was too important to be left solely in the hands of someone like Bean or his successors, or in the hands of those who had served in action.

Dr Michael McKernan, a former Deputy Director of the Australian War Memorial, suggests that the academic histories that appeared in the 1970s fell into three categories: 'a social-democratic model inherited from Charles Bean; a "war and society" approach, derived from mainstream Australian social history; and a technical-analytical model, derived from an international perspective, dependent for its inspiration on contemporary work in America and Europe'.<sup>25</sup>

McKernan rightly points to Bill Gammage's *The Broken Years* (1974) as the seminal work in the social-democratic model. Gammage deliberately avoided military analysis and considerations of command and strategy. Years later he spoke at a Chief of the Army's conference on the role that the Army played in shaping Australia as a nation before 1939.<sup>26</sup> He dismayed many of those attending the conference when he argued that the Army's role was slight. For Gammage, the First AIF was not part of the Australian Army—nor did he see his book as 'a military history of the First AIF'.<sup>27</sup> Both views are open to challenge.

By any definition of an army, the First AIF was part of the Australian Army. The particular conditions for service in the AIF reflected the wishes of the Australian people. The volunteer citizen soldiers who landed at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915 represented the nation in uniform. But the compulsorily enlisted militiamen who fought on the Kokoda Trail, the volunteer regulars who served in the Malayan Emergency, and the national servicemen in Vietnam, also represented the nation in uniform. In many ways, once you are in the Army, it does not matter how you were enlisted. You still have to obey orders, including those that lead to your death.

As for military history, Gammage's brilliant book made a huge contribution to Australian military history. It led to other more popular books such as Patsy Adam-Smith's *The Anzacs* (1978), and to films and television serials.<sup>28</sup> In 1987 John Barrett published *We Were There*, a study of the experiences of Australian soldiers in the Second World War, and more recently Mark Johnston, in *At the Front Line* (1996), has also looked at the experiences of Australian soldiers.<sup>29</sup>

McKernan attributes his second category, the 'war and society' school, to the influence of Lloyd Robson at Melbourne University, whose study of the recruitment of the First AIF appeared in 1970.<sup>30</sup> Books that fall into this category have attempted to place Australia's experience of war in the context of society at large. Significantly, the authors in this school usually come from non-military academic backgrounds, and thus present insights which military writers might overlook, or deliberately avoid. For example in *Gull Force* (1988), a study of the Australian force captured on Ambon, Joan Beaumont focuses on the social dynamics of the group.<sup>31</sup> The increased role of non-military academics has been one of the most important developments in giving life to Australian military history.

McKernan's third category, the technical-analytic model, grew out of an attempt to analyse military campaigns in a way that reflected the military history traditions of American and Europe. In a sense it was a rejection of Bean's social-democratic style. Not surprisingly the authors came from within the Army and from those with close connections to the Army, Duntroon or the Defence Academy. John Robertson, for example, a lecturer at both Duntroon and the Defence Academy, never served in the Army, but his books on the Second World War and on Anzac have a great deal of astute analysis.<sup>32</sup>

While McKernan's categories provide a useful starting point for an analysis of the development of military history in the past thirty years, the approach can be too confining. The story is more complex. Military history works include biographies, campaign studies, war and society studies, the human face of war, corps histories, unit histories, and personal memoirs.

Let us look at biographies as an example. Sixteen years ago I presented a paper on Australian military biographies and said that the following questions demanded answers: Did General Monash fail at Gallipoli? What was his contribution to success on the Western Front? Did General Blamey act correctly in failing to advise the government about the Greek expedition? Should he have sacked General Rowell? Was Australia well served by his arguments with politicians and other generals? Was he right to direct offensive operations in Bougainville? Did General Gordon Bennett fail at Muar River and on Singapore Island? Should he have escaped from Singapore? Did he unnecessarily antagonise the British? Should General Lavarack have by-passed Merjayoun in Syria? How good was his advice to the government when he was on Java? Was General Sturdee's strategy for the defence of Australia early in 1942 correct? Was General Morshead right to order the counter attack of the 2/48th Battalion at Tobruk? Could General Allen have gone faster on the Kokoda Trail? To what extent was Herring responsible for the poor command relationships with the Americans at Salamaua?

Sixteen years later I can report that most of my questions have now been answered. Before the Second World War there were only two military biographies or autobiographies, Monash's *The Australian Victories in France in 1918* (1920) and General Gordon's *Chronicles of a Gay Gordon* (1921).<sup>33</sup> The overwhelming number of Australian military biographies has been written since the Second World War. In that time, by a quick count, there have been some 47 biographies or autobiographies of major Australian Army people. In the 1950s there were three biographies. In the 1960s there were two autobiographies. But in the 1970s there were eleven books, ten in the 1980s, sixteen in the 1990s, and five in 2000 alone.<sup>34</sup>

Some of these works, for example, the biographies of VC winners such as Jacka, Derrick and Cutler, or of medical doctors such as 'Weary' Dunlop, are in the Bean social-democratic model of building up the Anzac legend.<sup>35</sup> Serle's biography of Monash seeks to place him in Australian society while looking at him as both a man and as a military commander. Pedersen's biography of Monash is clearly in the category of military analysis, as is Lodge's study of Gordon Bennett and Hill's of Chauvel. Jeffrey Grey's biography of Horace Robertson tries to place his subject in the context of the development of the Staff Corps. Chris Coulthard Clark's biography of Gordon Legge looks at the issue of Australian nationalism.<sup>36</sup>

The types of questions I posed above about commanders could be applied equally to campaigns and to issues concerning policy and strategy. Some of the campaign studies, such as my book on the New Guinea campaign, or John Coates's account of the 9th Division at Finschhafen fall in the analytical school.<sup>37</sup> But others cross the boundaries to include aspects of the social-democratic or war and society schools. Examples might include Peter Charlton's account of Pozieres, Peter Stanley's *Tarakan* and Peter Brune's *Those Ragged Bloody Heroes*.<sup>38</sup>

The publication of unit histories by former unit members has continued apace, fuelled by the retirement of many old soldiers who at last were able to devote time to the task, and also by the proliferation of personal computers. Several unit histories, including Margaret Barter's carefully researched *Far Above Battle*, explored wider issues and might just as easily be included among the 'war and society' studies.<sup>39</sup>

More important to the study of the Australian Army as an institution was the publication of corps histories. Key histories included those of Armour, Engineers, the Special Air Service Regiment, the Royal Australian Regiment, and Artillery. Of a similar nature are the institutional histories covering Duntroon and Portsea.

Although the later official histories lacked the impact of the earlier volumes, they were, nonetheless, highly impressive pieces of scholarship. The official history of *Australia in the Korean War* by Robert O'Neill provides both a detailed account of the Army's role on that war, as well as the diplomatic background to its employment and the impact on the wider Army.<sup>40</sup> The eight-volume *Official History of Australia's Involvement in South East Asian Conflicts 1948-1975*, edited by Peter Edwards, makes a major contribution to our understanding of how the Army developed during this period, and its operational experience in Malaya, Borneo and South Vietnam. From the Army's point of view the most important volume is Ian McNeill's outstanding *To Long Tan* published in 1993, but publication of his second volume covering Army operations in Vietnam from 1967 to 1972 has been delayed following his death in 1998.<sup>41</sup> Unlike the earlier official histories, the South East Asia volumes have deliberately rejected the idea of describing every military action.

These books together comprise an impressive base for the understanding of the history of the Australian Army over 100 years. But there are still areas that need further research. These might include: tactical doctrine; operational logistics; the Army between the wars; the sociology of the Army and its officer corps; the relationship between the Army and the government; army training; and the development and role of the office of the Chief of Army and its predecessors. Some of these subjects have been explored in academic theses but have never been published.

The last seven years has seen something of a renaissance in Army history. In 1992, in a return to the days of Keogh, Army Training Command commissioned specific historical studies and Lieutenant Colonel Bob Breen wrote two useful books on the battles of Maryang San and Kapyong.<sup>42</sup> Training Command also produced an excellent video on the Kokoda campaign, followed by videos on the battle of Hamel and on the Syrian campaign, both of which spawned books.

From Breen's experience with Training Command came the appointment of an operational historian in Land Headquarters. In due course Breen published his account of 1 RAR in Somalia.<sup>43</sup> Breen's book raises important questions about Army history in terms of how lessons, and especially shortcomings, are to be analysed for future use. It is extremely difficult to write a critical account soon after an event, especially when the author is beholden to the organisation for the opportunity to visit the battle area, and also to the organisation for his future employment. To Breen's credit, he went about as far as he could with his Somalia story. But how much can a book published in 2001 tell the full story of INTERFET in East Timor, when we still have Australian forces there and when relations with Indonesia are still fragile?<sup>44</sup>

While Training Command has been important, the driving force behind Army history has been the Army History Unit that was formed in the mid 1990s. Administered by the unit, the Army history grants scheme has encouraged the writing of Army history and has assisted with the publication of numerous books and articles. And the Army history publications program has resulted in the publication of a further twenty books in the last five years with more in the pipeline.

The key issue for the historian is sources. The Australian War Memorial is the first place one goes when researching any of the Army's military operations. Just as Charles Bean set the standard for a distinctly Australian style of military history writing, the Australian War Memorial contains a distinctly Australian archive for the study of Australian military history. There historians find the essential building blocks for their work. These begin with the war diaries or commanders' diaries that give a day-by-day running account of the unit or headquarters. Attention is then given to the official records that originated in the large headquarters including Army headquarters. The War Memorial also has records donated by individuals, including letters and diaries.

But historians of the Army's peacetime activities often cannot call upon these resources. When Dr Albert Palazzo began writing the history of the Royal Australian Corps of Transport he found that the files were almost non-existent.<sup>45</sup> The Army needs to give more attention to recording its peacetime history and to preserving its record of peacetime activities.

With operational history there are usually more records than for peacetime activities, but there is always a danger in becoming a prisoner of the files, especially the war diaries. In his excellent book about 8 RAR in Vietnam, Bob Hall complained that many of the unit histories of the Vietnam War were merely chronological accounts based on operations' logs and commanders' diaries. He wrote:

Though particular incidents scream for a digression that would provide context or deeper analysis, the authors find it impossible to escape the tyranny of chronology—This approach may form a useful record for those who served with the battalion and whose memories provide the context, but it fails to explain to a broader readership what infantry operations in Vietnam were really like. The personal dimension is often overlooked.<sup>46</sup>

He continues that history should not be a memorial, but contain critical and fearless evaluation. An attempt must 'be made to confront reality because, no matter how depressing or negative this may be, it is the first step towards coming to terms with it'.

This view is both right and wrong. Critical analyses are essential to military history. But there is no one model of military history and the various styles all have their purposes. The first step in history is to determine, as much as possible, what happened. Only then can the analysis follow. And of course the members of each battalion want their history—their memorial to one of the formative periods of their lives and of their part in history. It is beyond dispute, however, that military history is about people, and the personal dimension must exist alongside evaluation and analysis.

What are the challenges facing the military historian today? One challenge is the proliferation of second-rate military history books—especially memoirs—published either by small niche publishers or by the authors themselves. There is always the danger of the bad driving out the good. Yet while many of these works are mediocre in terms of scholarship, style and balance, and generally deal with issues of limited interest, they often hide nuggets of valuable information. The military historian must be aware of these sub-standard works but not be lured into them simply because there is a market and a willing publisher.

As always, the problem of sources remains, compounded now by the multiplication of the means of transmitting information—written orders, telephone, radio, facsimile, email and intranet. Can we be sure that all the orders issued by these means will be preserved? There

is also the problem of the demands of immediacy—to gather military lessons and to win the struggle for public opinion. Perhaps this means that there is an even greater need than in the past for the Army to employ in-house historians. But will the Army be willing to put more resources into training and employing historians? In future almost all of the Army's operations will be conducted on a joint basis. At the moment, the Army's history is being driven by the Army History Unit or by one of the Army's commands. But in future, to provide a clear and useful picture the story will have to be told from a joint perspective. Will we see the demise of Army history, to be replaced by ADF history? Or do we go further? Do we include the work of other government agencies as well as non-government organisations?

Over a period of 100 years Australia had developed a distinct approach to the study of military history. Most of its components are not unique to Australia—it is the mix and the emphasis that is different. We have seen both a diversification of styles and approaches to army history, and a blending of McKernan's categories to produce histories with various layers of technical analysis and social commentary. The stories that these histories tell about the Australian Army together give us our special history. What then does the history of the Australian Army tell us about the Australian Army? Let me try to summarise that history in a few paragraphs.

Although Australia was only a small country on the world stage, in two world wars it played key roles in several campaigns that had a major influence over the outcome of the war. On the Western Front in the First World War the Australian Army met and defeated the enemy's main army in the decisive theatre. In the Second World War, at Tobruk, it became the first army to defeat a German blitzkrieg-style attack.

As the Army of a democracy it has fought in wars in which Australia was under direct threat, but also in wars and campaigns when the direct threat to Australia was not so clear. As well as the world wars it has fought in limited wars, counter-insurgencies and low-level conflicts. It has taken part in peace enforcement, peacekeeping and in humanitarian operations.

The Army has experienced disastrous campaigns and defeats, as well as great victories. It fought determined defensive battles, and pulled off some remarkable attacks. It captured hundreds of thousands of prisoners, but had thousands of its own members captured. It also had its tragic mistakes, such as at the Nek, Fromelles, Parit Sulong and Ruin Ridge. And we need to acknowledge that it has had its disgraces, such as Wilmansrust, the Wassia riots, the 1918 mutinies, the massacre at Surafend and incidents before the Singapore surrender.

Initially the Army made its name with light horse operations, and then gained renown for infantry operations. But despite the light horse tradition, the Army has never conducted armoured manoeuvre operations. The Army developed expertise in jungle warfare, and also in counter-insurgency operations. Its experience of amphibious warfare extends from Gallipoli to East Timor. Its experience of cooperation with the Air Force runs from Hamel to East Timor. A feature of its operations has been its heavy involvement in coalition operations. Indeed it is hard to think of an Australian Army campaign in which Allied forces have not been involved.

A popular image of the Australian Army on operations is one of dashing, reckless soldiers, buoyed by mateship, led by natural citizen officers, achieving great victories by seizing the moment. Since the middle of the First World War the record is more prosaic. Careful planning, usually by trained staff officers, plus a desire to minimise casualties have marked Australian operations. In short, while Australia has a tradition of citizen soldiers, it also has a well-deserved reputation for professionalism.

All this has been achieved by a democracy with a small population and a limited economy.

As an institution, the Australian Army has been based on part-time volunteers, on compulsorily enlisted part-time soldiers, and on volunteer full-time professionals. It has endured, or enjoyed, long years of peace, but in the middle of the century spent almost thirty years on continuous operations it has been decimated, abused and starved by politicians. It

has also been satiated with more personnel that it could usefully employ. The members of the Australian Army have at times held a central place in Australian society and in the hearts of its people. At other times they have been ignored, ostracised and even despised merely for carrying out the directions of the elected government. Through all this, the Australian Army has had little involvement in aid to the civil power, has never interfered in government, and has never oppressed the Australian people.

This is the record that shines through 100 years of Army history. It is a record told in hundreds of books, by hundreds of authors, in academic tomes, in personal memoirs, in emotive memorials to the Anzac legend, and in dry combat analyses. It is a story in which every Australian can take pride.

## Endnotes

David Horner acknowledges the assistance of Carla Anne Schmidt of Yale University in preparing this essay.

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