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2a Alpha St  
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# SABRETACHE

## The Journal and Proceedings of the Military Historical Society of Australia (founded 1957)

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**DECEMBER 2022**


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The aims of the Society are the encouragement and pursuit of study and research in military history, customs, traditions, dress, arms, equipment and kindred matters; the promotion of public interest and knowledge in these subjects, and the preservation of historical military objects with particular reference to the armed forces of Australia.

### **Constitution and Rules**

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The Constitution and Rules of the Society, dated 2021, are available on the website at [www.mhsa.org.au](http://www.mhsa.org.au).

### ***Sabretache***

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The Federal Council is responsible for the publication of the Society journal, *Sabretache*, which is despatched to each member of the Society quarterly.

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### Editorial

The end of every year tends to prompt a review of events, goals, achievements and challenges. At a macro-level there have been an array of developments that have impacted many of us on a micro-level. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has shown how events on the other side of the world have the ability to alter economic conditions locally. As a country with middle power pretensions, Australia can use the conflict as instructive. A small country, with limited military forces can stand up to a large power. The Ukrainian fighting spirit, certainly assisted by Western technology and munitions, has been a somewhat David versus Goliath scenario. That they have been successful demonstrates that large forces, such as Russia, can readily develop into slow and ponderous behemoths. Closer to home, though, Australia continues to realise the difficult position that it is in. Unlike the Cold War, Australia's largest trading partner is at increasing loggerheads with Australia's long-standing military ally. While some hawks see that a war is inevitable (see Reviews) that is not necessarily the case. Only time will tell, but this is one challenge that will be as difficult next year as this.

**Justin Chadwick**

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# **100th Birthday Celebrations for an Old Soldier: (VX104343, V158035, 337556) Brigadier (Retd) Herbert 'Bert' Wheatley Barker on 13 December 2021**

## **Herbert Barker with Ross Grant and Steve Evans<sup>1</sup>**

Brigadier Herbert 'Bert' W Barker (Retd) joined the Army in 1941, following completion of the second year of a Bachelor of Electrical Engineering course at the University of Melbourne. Although he did not complete his degree, he had previously completed a Diploma of Mechanical Engineering, and as a result, was allocated to Australian Army Ordnance Corps (AAOC), as a private. He then attended an Infantry Officer Training Course at Bonegilla.

Bert was commissioned in June 1942 and appointed to raise and command 320 Australian LAD (Light Aid Detachment) attached to a major signals unit at Balcombe, Victoria. A short time later, while attending an Ordnance Mechanical Engineering Wireless Course at the AAOC School in Broadmeadows, Victoria, he was transferred to the newly formed AEME (Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers) Corps on 1 December 1942. He celebrated his 21st birthday twelve days later.

Lieutenant, and later, Captain Barker, spent most of the Second World War at Oatlands Golf Course, Parramatta, then the Atherton Tablelands (1943) before heading to New Britain in 1944, where he served with 1 Infantry Troops Workshops till the end of the war.

After the war, Bert continued his service in several workshops postings in Australia until 1950, when he was sent to the United Kingdom for two and a half years, to attend the Long Electronics Engineering Courses at REME Training Centre, Arborfield. He attended Army Staff College, Queenscliff, Victoria, in 1956 and was appointed Commanding Officer and Chief Instructor of the RAEME Training Centre from between 1959 and 1964.

After three years as DDEME (deputy director of Electrical and Mechanical

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<sup>1</sup> Brigadier Ross Grant (Retd) completed over 37 years' service in the Australian Army, undertaking a series of command, aeronautical engineering, general engineering, project management, training, logistic and technical staff appointments. These postings were in Land Command, Logistic Command, Support Command (Australia) and the Defence Materiel Organisation.

Colonel Steve Evans graduated from ADFA in 1989 and RMC the following year. His service career was spent predominantly in Army aviation until given command of Joint Logistics Unit (North) in 2007. Promoted colonel in 2011 he became Director of Aviation Support in Headquarters Forces Command until transferring to the Army Reserve in 2014.

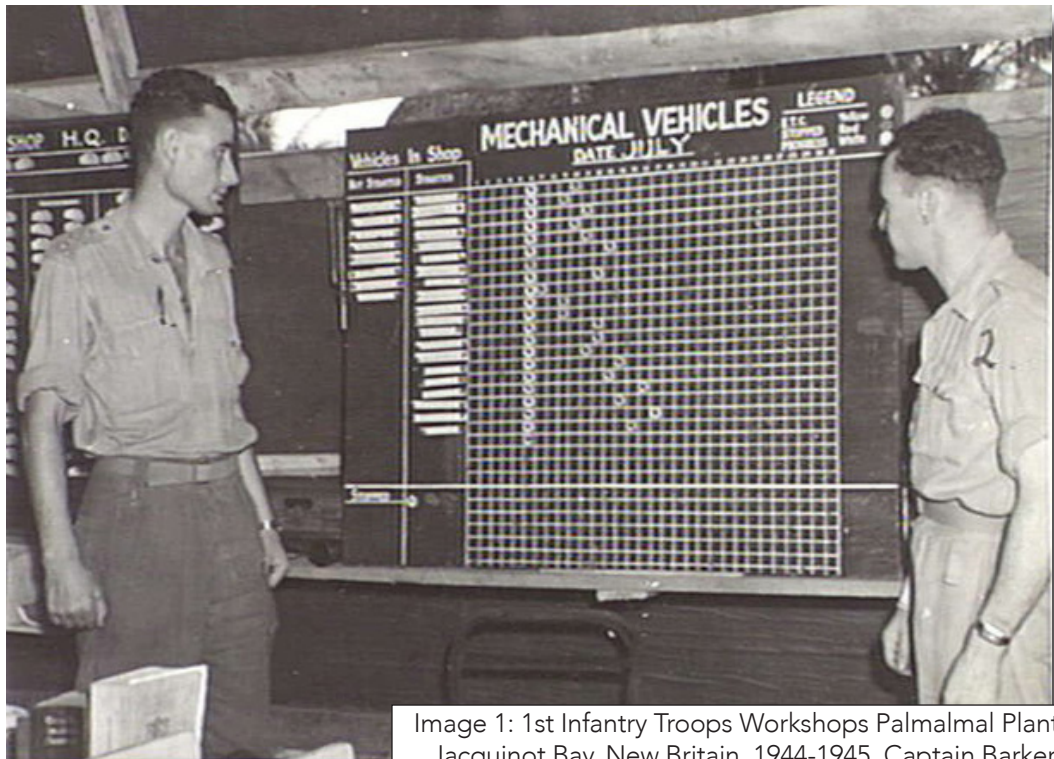


Image 1: 1st Infantry Troops Workshops Palmalmal Plantation, Jacquinot Bay, New Britain, 1944-1945. Captain Barker and Sergeant S Aaron review vehicle repair and maintenance production. Source: AWM 093794.

Engineers) Eastern Command, Bert was promoted to brigadier and appointed Chief Superintendent of the Army Design Establishment (ADE), Maribyrnong, Victoria. He served for a further three years until resigning from the Army in 1974. During his time at ADE, he took part in the Rapier missile system trials in Darwin. In his subsequent civilian career, Bert worked as regional engineering manager for STC, 1975, the Boy Scout Jamboree Executive Officer and CEO of the Australian Fire Protection Association, each for about a year before relocating from Melbourne to a warmer climate in northern New South Wales in late 1977. He served as Colonel Commandant of the 1st Military District from 1980 to 1984.

Bert married Nona in 1944 and they have three daughters, six grandchildren and eight great grandchildren. He and Nona live in Darlington Retirement Village, Banora Point, NSW. Whilst Nona receives full time care, Bert enjoys semi-care in the same facility, is still driving his car and routinely attends local RAQ events.

Bert turned 100 on 13 December 2021.



Image 2: Palmal Plantation Jacquinot Bay, New Britain, 1945 showing the Jeep repair line. Source: AWM 093787.

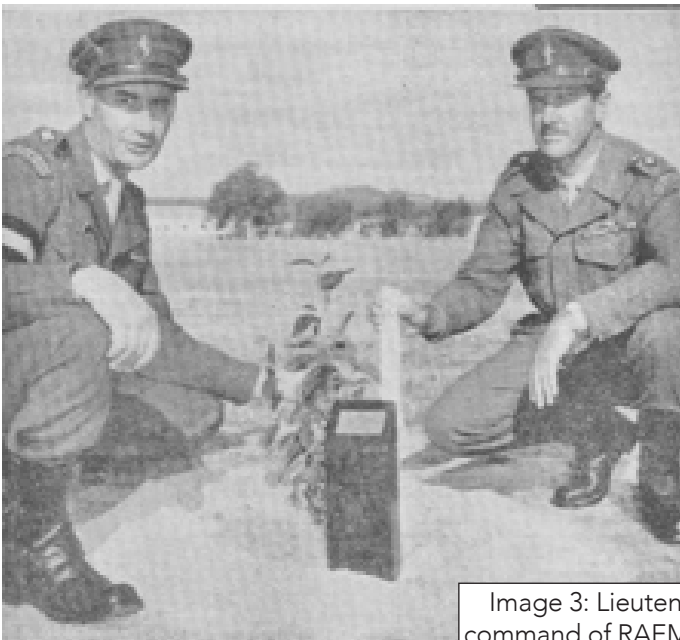


Image 3: Lieutenant Colonel 'Bert' Barker (left) handing over command of RAEME Training Centre (RTC) in 1964 to Lieutenant Colonel Bruce C. Sefton, signified by a tree planting in the grounds of RTC. Source: Ross Grant.

Brigadier Bert belongs to a rare surviving cohort of servicemen, not just because they are closing in on their 100th birthdays, but also because they are original members of the proud Corps of RAEME, which will celebrate its 80th Birthday in December 2022. Bert is indeed a pioneer of the Corps and through his many postings, his various commands, training and staff appointments, over 33 years' service, it is clear he made a huge contribution to the Corps, the Army and the ADF.

Brigadier Bert is much admired by his peers but also by those members of the Corps who came later. Most recently, he has been an inspiration to a new generation of RAEME servicemen and women (serving and retired), as an active member of RAEME Association Queensland, where he regularly attends its many activities and lunches in Brisbane, and on the Gold and Sunshine Coasts. Congratulations Bert on this most important anniversary.



Image 4: Brigadier Barker, Colonel Commandant 1st Military District visiting 5 Base Workshop Battalion 1981, Oakey, discussing repairs to an aerofoil with CO, Lieutenant Colonel Bob Millar. Source: Ross Grant.



Image 5: Brigadier Barker taking the salute on the occasion of the 9th Anniversary of 5 Base Workshop Battalion, Oakey 31 July 1981. Source: Ross Grant.

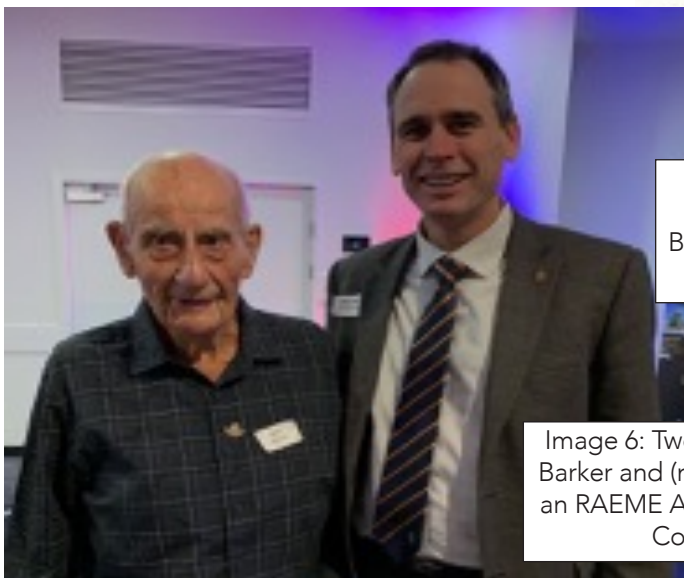


Image 6: Two RAEME brigadiers, old and new, Bert Barker and (now) Major General Andrew Freeman at an RAEME Association Queensland lunch, Sunshine Coast, 2019. Source: Ross Grant.

# The Military History Section Team's Patrol to the Eastern End of Portuguese Timor, 29 December 1945–9 January 1946

Edward Willis<sup>1</sup>

At the end of the Second World War, ex-No. 2 Australian Independent Company (better known by its later name the 2/2 Commando Company) soldier George Milsom (TX4141) was promoted to sergeant and became a member of a three-man Military History Section (MHS) Team that was sent to both Dutch and Portuguese Timor to record significant campaign sites.<sup>2</sup> George was the guide of this team; Lieutenant Charles Bush was the official war artist<sup>3</sup> and Sergeant Keith Davis the photographer.<sup>4</sup>

George Milsom was an avid letter writer and his parents kept all of his letters. This article features a letter dated 14 January 1946 that he wrote after the Military History Team had completed its patrol to campaign sites at the eastern end of Portuguese Timor.

The 12-day patrol travelled through the following locations: Dili, Manatuto, Vemasse, Baucau, Lautem, Lore, Fuloro and Ossu then back to Dili. Milsom's narrative of the patrol is complemented by Davis's photographs and Bush's artworks of some of the locations visited by the team. The adventures and social activities of the men and their reliance on the hard-working jeep as their mode of transport makes for interesting and entertaining reading.

## The Military History Section

The creation of a war records section for the Second World War was approved by Cabinet in early 1940. As the Second AIF was not a compact force, but comprised a number of divisions in separate theatres, it was proposed by Major J.L. Treloar, director of the Australian War Memorial (AWM) and liaison officer for the Department of Information and the AWM, that, while maintaining representation

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1 Edward Willis is a former president, 2/2 Commando Association of Australia (<https://doublereds.org.au>). Since 2008 he has been researching and writing about Australian involvement in Portuguese Timor during the Second World War, especially the guerrilla campaign conducted by the No. 2 and No. 4 Australian Independent Companies (popularly known as the 2/2 and 2/4) against the Japanese occupation forces (1941-1943). He developed an interest in this topic because his father served as a Signaller with the 2/2 during the campaign.

2 Milsom, George James Beedham: Service Number - TX1414, NAA B883, TX4141.

3 Bush, Charles William: Service Number - VX128043, NAA B883, VX128043.

4 Davis, Keith Benjamin: Service Number - VX128381, NAA B883, VX128381.



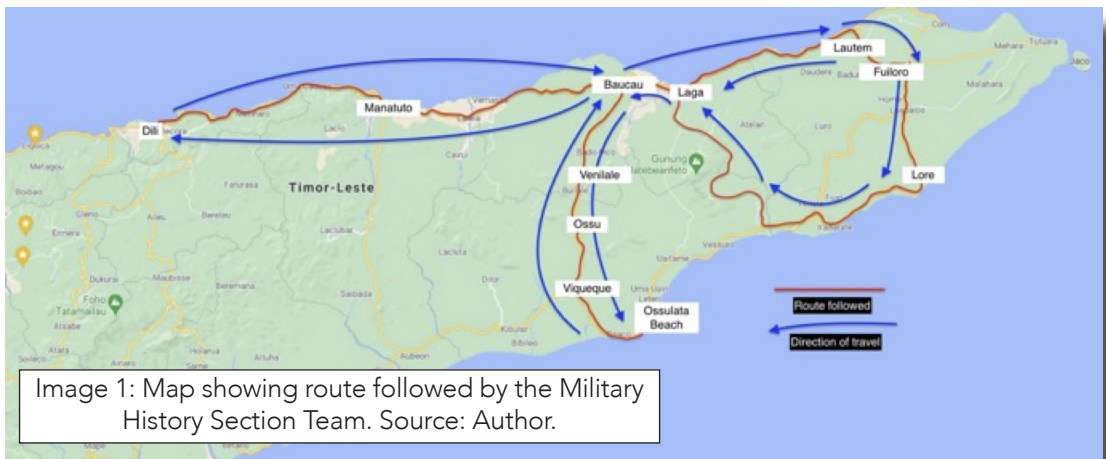


Image 1: Map showing route followed by the Military History Section Team. Source: Author.

at AIF headquarters, the Section should have field teams attached to each formation (division) headquarters. This scheme was approved by General Thomas Blamey, and the Section was reorganised accordingly in June 1941 and renamed the Military History and Information Section. With the section's return to Australia later the same year, publicity functions it had performed in the Middle East were taken over by the Army Directorate of Public Relations and became known as the Military Historical Section (MHS). It was part of the Staff Duties Directorate of the General Staff Branch. Treloar was the officer-in-charge of the MHS until 1946.

The MHS's wartime functions were generally threefold:

- (i) collect and collate historical material relating to the Army,
- (ii) gather war relics for the AWM, and
- (iii) provide, by photography, film, art and written narratives a comprehensive record of the day-to-day life of the Army.

From its headquarters in Melbourne the MHS despatched and directed the activities of the field teams. The large collection of historical material gathered by MHS teams was transferred to the AWM from September 1946.<sup>5</sup>

### The MHS Timor Team

The capitulation of Japan saw Brigadier Lewis Dyke take the surrender of Japanese forces in Timor in September 1945. As commander of Timor Force, he was responsible for the recovery of prisoners of war, the disarming and concentration of Japanese troops, the welfare of the civil populace, and liaison and negotiation with the authorities in Portuguese Timor.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Olwen Pryke, *With a camera and notebook?: the Military History Section 1940-1946*, self-published, Canberra, 1999.

A Military History Section field team was attached to Timor Force and assigned to collect information related to the war in Timor for the historical record. An important part of this was taking photographs and making sketches of people and places that had been significant for the Australians who had served there.

In Portuguese Timor on 5 September 1945, the Japanese commanding officer met Governor Manuel Ferreira de Carvalho, effectively returning power to him and placing the Japanese forces under his authority. On 11 September, Timor Force personnel, including the MHS team, arrived in Koepang harbour and accepted the surrender of all Japanese forces on Timor from the senior Japanese officer on Timor, Colonel Kaida Tatsuichi of the 4th Tank Regiment. Brigadier Dyke, a senior diplomat, W. D. Forsyth, and ‘as many ships as possible’ (five corvettes) were subsequently dispatched to Dili, arriving on 23 September. The MHS team were part of this contingent. Surrender ceremonies were held with Australians, Portuguese and other local residents. Keith Davis took numerous photos of the surrender ceremonies and the individuals involved, sites in the Dili township that had been devastated by allied bombing and parked Japanese vehicles and other military equipment at Taibessi that had been deliberately set alight. Australian troops then supervised the disposal of arms by Japanese work parties – also photographed by Davis – before returning to Koepang for the surrender of the commander of the 48th Division, Lieutenant General Yamada Kunitaro on 3 October 1945.<sup>8</sup>

From then until early December the MHS team continued their work in Dutch Timor and nearby islands until the Portuguese administration gave them permission to re-enter Portuguese Timor on 1 December 1945. Between 4 and 28 December they surveyed and documented sites in Dili and its surrounds, and then travelled south visiting Hatolia, Bobonaro, Mape, Beco, Hatu Udo, Betano, Sue River, Same, Maubisse, Ainaro and Aileu.

They were then ready to investigate the eastern end of Portuguese Timor and completed the following itinerary:<sup>9</sup>

Date	December 1945	Keith Davis' Diary Entries
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6 Gavin Long, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945: The Final Campaigns*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1963, pp. 554, and 570-573.

7 For a description and analysis of one of Davis's surrender ceremony photographs, see Steven Farram, 'Looking at history: a consideration of two photographs; one from Darwin, one from Dili', *Circa: the Journal of Professional Historians*, issue 6 (2018), pp. 5-41. For a similar description and analysis of Davis's photographs of liberated Javanese comfort women in Dutch Timor, see Vera Mackie, 'Gender, geopolitics and gaps in the records', in *Sources and Methods in Histories of Colonialism: Approaching the Imperial Archive*, Kirsty Reid and Fiona Paisley (eds.), Routledge, Abingdon, 2017, pp.135-159.

8 William Bradley Horton, 'Through the eyes of Australians: the Timor area in the early postwar period', *Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies*, no. 12 (2009), pp. 251-277.

29	Dili-Manatuto-Baucau	Jeep loaded with Chas, George, Camara, Akiu, Fernando, Antonio & KBD.
30	Baucau-Lautem	Lautem was very important storage centre for the Japanese.
31	Lautem-River Laivai-Baucau-Manatuto	NEW YEAR EVE PARTY!!
	January 1946	
1	Manatuto, Baucau, Lautem	FELIZ ANO NOVA! Rivers had subsided: so had we!
2	Lautem	Visit airstrip, rain prevented any pictures.
3	Lautem, Fuiloro, Loré	Jeep needs resuscitation before we can set out on trip to site of crashed Hudson bomber.
4	Loré, Baucau	Short time for pictures.
5	Baucau, Venilale, Ossu, Viqueque	Rain allowed 3 photos to be taken.
6	Viqueque, Ossu	Road to Aliambata blocked, rain damaged. Photos of Raimundo Meira Bridge on way.
7	Ossu	A most attractive Posto.
8	Ossu, Mundo Perdido, Venilale, Ossulata Beach, Baucau	From the Venilale-Ossu Saddle in the Laurime Range both coasts of Timor can be seen. Swim at Ossulata in clearest sea water imaginable.
9	Baucau, Laleia River, Manatuto, Dili	KBD carried across river in makeshift 'sedan-chair'.

After returning to Dili, the Team spent the remainder of January 1946 exploring around the township, returned to Ainaro, Maubisse and Aileu and concluded their stint in Portuguese Timor by travelling west along the north coast to Liquica and Maubara before returning to Koepang. Following the withdrawal of Timor Force in February, their final work was covering the Timor related war crimes proceedings in Darwin in early March 1946.<sup>10</sup>

### **George Milsom's letter to his parents describing the MHS Team's**

9 Copy of itinerary and Keith Davis' diary entries in author's possession.

10 Georgina Fitzpatrick 'The Trials in Darwin' in Georgina Fitzpatrick, Tim McCormack and Narrelle Morris, *Australia's War Crimes Trials 1945-51*, Brill Nijhoff, Leiden, 2016, pp. 471-506; includes photos taken by Keith Davis. Bush filled two sketchbooks and later completed paintings illustrating the trial proceedings; see 'Charles William Bush' <https://www.awm.gov.au/people/P65029/>.

## Patrol to the Eastern end of Portuguese Timor

Milsom's letter is reproduced here complemented by some of the related photographs taken by Keith Davis and George Bush's art works. Also included are photos of some of the same locations taken by the author on recent field trips.

Dilli 14/1/46

I have not written to you this year and what with all the festivities and running round I have hardly had time to enter all the unusual and amazing experiences in my diary, we shall never forget New Year's Eve and New Years Day.

When I write the entry in my diary I found I had put all the happenings in the one day, did not even bother to start a New Year. The **QUANZA** a Portuguese ship is in port unloading thousands of tons of supplies after which it will go to Fremantle on its return to Lisbon; I hope to send this letter by her. She may go out in about a week. I wish I had some more money to buy things off her; I have a lovely Omega watch and would like to get another but now I am short, there are some beautiful things here too. We cannot even get word to Koepang for some money; I suppose we shall find some way out of it. Cigarettes are pretty plentiful, many different brands and some from South Africa; I'll try to get as many as I can if only for souvenirs.

To get back to where I left off in my last letter. We set off for the Eastern end of the island on 29th Dec, this time with a Porto sergeant named Manuel Camara; one big happy jeep-load of four Tuans and



Image 2: Subao Grande, Portuguese Timor, December 1945. Sparsely wooded hillsides leading down to the sea beside the Dili to Manatuto road. (Photographer Sgt K.B. Davis). Source: AWM 125186.



The same location, photographed 8 August 2022.

Image 3: George Milsom with Charles Bush, unknown location, Portuguese Timor, January 1946. Source: Author.



three Creados plus a trailer of gear and food. Had a good trip round a glorious coast road that sometimes ran over salt pans, then round a cliff high above the sea and in places the roadway was built up over the sea. We climbed a range where the road was just a ledge cut into the steep side of the mountain.

We forded some rivers and crossed others on Japanese constructed bridges. Had a nice lunch at MANATUTO and later pushed on to BAUCAU. Encountered very heavy rain at VERMASSE and the road became sticky, especially over the BAUCAU plateau. This town is the next largest to DILI but has been mauled and bombed till almost beyond repair. Somehow the Portos have things going again and are living in patched houses. We stayed a right there and went on to LAUTEM next day (Sunday). There we found the Administrator Senhor GONSALVES sitting on the verandah of a house that the Japs had built and used for their HQ. He is a big chap, big-hearted, and welcomed us with VINHO DA PORTO.

He has gathered round him all the Japanese junk from the area, broken down bombers and small motor cars; I have never seen such a collection before. We slept in Japanese beds with sheets and mosquito nets and had hot bathe in the concrete bath the Japs had built. Then we went



to the airfield and you should see the wrecked planes, all in the most fantastic angles and positions, you will have to see the photo to believe it.

We did not run short of petrol there because there is a dump of 56,000 44 gallon drums there. The Administrator has trucks, cars and hundreds of bicycles. One shed he has is full of gear, one wall was covered with chiming clocks. He gave us some souvenirs. The junk heap was even able to supply us with two wheels for the jeep.

After staying the night and deciding to go on to LORE on 31st the Administrator said, 'Would you like to go to the New Year Festival and Dance at MANATUTO?' We accepted, and here the fun commenced. We left LAUTEM and had a good 11/2 hours run to BAUCAU, had afternoon tea, and continued on our way to MANATUTO. At the VEMASSE river we found the river swollen with muddy water and impossible to cross so decided to wait rather than go back and after about two hours the water had gone down a fair bit. Although it was 8 p.m. and dark I decided to give the jeep a go at the crossing, so I put it into low ratio four wheel drive and ventured forth. She went well till we got about three parts of the way over, then the front wheels went into a hole, the engine gave a choke and conked out. By this time the water was rushing in a torrent straight through the jeep over the seats and even with the glove-box. The rush of water moved the jeep downstream a few yards, so we climbed out and got a mob of natives to push us over. The head and tail lights still burned and I had previously connected the trouble lamp. When on dry land we pulled the plugs out, drained away the mud and water, gave the engine a kick over to empty the exhaust and silencer, and started up and went on to the LALEILA river to have a repeat performance. We reached MANATUTO just as everyone was finishing the dinner and setting off to the dance. As we were wet through and so was our change of clothes we had a bath and managed to borrow a change of clothes; I had a pair of grey trousers and a safari jacket belonging to the Administrator. Then we had a meal and set off to the dance. It was marvellous. A long shed had been especially constructed by the natives and gaily decorated inside and out. It was lighted with Chinese lanterns and in the centre was a raised platform for an orchestra supplied by BARTOLOMEO DIAZ. At the end of the stand was a drink bar with wine, brandy, a native cocktail, and 'TUAKA'. I think I tried them all. It was not long before I was dancing round in a ring with the INTENDANT of BAUCAU and three CHEFES DA POSTO teaching them to sing 'She'll be coming round the mountain when she comes'. This amazed the crowd because an INTENDANT is rather a high official; he is one of the Governor's aides. Well it's the first time I



Image 4: Port Lookout, Lore (Sae) 1946-1-4  
(Artist Charles Bush).  
Source: AWM ART26157.



The same location, photographed  
12 August 2022.

have ever danced until eight in the morning. There were very few white girls there, but I danced with them all and many Timor girls.

We picked up the dances easily, they are very similar to ours. Charles and Keith faded out about 4 a.m. but everyone who had gone to sleep was awakened by the drums and parade round the houses; about 2000 natives and others went in a long crocodile and I took over the drum for a while, it was all great fun and seemed unreal. 'FLEIZ ANNO NOVA' end 'FLIEIZ NATAL' will always remain in my memory.

At 11 a.m. we set out on our return journey pretty weary. WE had a good lunch at BAUCAU but then we got to the MALAI River that was in flood, so we had to wait again and with a number of natives built a roadway over the deepest part and: crossed over o.k. Had a good dinner at LAUTEM and went to bed and did very little their next day except to get the jeep ready to go on to LORE. Having got it ready it refused to start until I had taken out the plugs and cleaned them. We had a good lunch at FUILORO and arrived at LORE at four p.m.

We were shown a crashed HUDSON bomber in which six Australians had lost their lives; the wreckage was fenced in by the natives.<sup>11</sup> The most peculiar thing we saw was some Jap defences on the beach below LORE; the Japs had put small sharp bamboo stakes up in the sand, thousands of

<sup>11</sup> Milsom is referring to Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) 13 Squadron Hudson bomber A16-166 that was shot down by Japanese fighters off Cape Lore while flying in support of an air raid on ships at Nova Ancora. All five [not six] crew members were killed in action. See David Vincent, *The RAAF Hudson Story – Book Two*, Vincent Aviation Publications, Highbury, 2010, pp. 90-91. The rotary component of one of the downed Hudson's engines is on display in front of the Lore posto (port lookout) ruins and was photographed by the author on 12 August 2022.

them inclined towards the sea and they evidently anticipated a landing. Also on the LAUTEM plateau was a similar sight, thousands of sharp bamboo stakes about 7 or 8 feet long pointing straight up as a defence against para troops.

We left LORE at 2 p.m. and went back to BAUCAU. Our original plan was to go down the coast from LORE to VIQUEQUE but owing to rains the CHINO river was swollen. At OSSU we picked up the CHEFE DA POSTO and took him to VIQUEQUE where we stayed



Image 5: Ossu, Portuguese Timor, July 1946. Australians of Sparrow Force used this house as headquarters when occupying the town in 1942. (Photographer Sgt K.B. Davis). Source: AWM 125241.



The same house in Ossu, photographed 15 August 2022.

a night. Next day we tried to get up the coast to HATOLARE, but another big river stopped us (the BEVAI) - it is not marked on my map. We had some fun when the jeep fell through a small bridge, but we managed to lever it out and carry on as usual. Stayed two nights at OSSU which to my mind is the prettiest and best located place on the island. The surrounding mountains LAURTINE and MUNDO PERDIDO present a glorious sight, especially at sunrise and sunset. The CHEFE DA POSTO at OSSU is very young and full of life and we had a great time there.

When we reached BAUCAU on the 8th we learned that the big bridge over the LALIELA River had a span torn out by the flood and that it was impossible to get through, so we spent another night at BAUCAU. Next morning we started out at 5 a.m. arriving at LALIELA at 7. Viewed the bridge and river with doubt, took some photos of the bridge, had

a breakfast of pineapple. The latter event attracted such a crowd of natives that it gave me courage to give the river bed a go. It was about 200 yards across and for the third time we plunged into a volume of dirty water of unknown depth. We got completely stuck in some sand but about 50 yelling natives made light work of getting us across. The water did not come up to the glove box this time. When we got across the natives shouted with delight, so we gave them a 5 pataca note to split up amongst them. How they were going to do that would keep them occupied for the next fortnight I should think.

That proved to be the last obstacle and we arrived in DILI for a late lunch. That night we went aboard the QUANZA had some beer in both lounges, had a look at what the bar tenders had to offer and came off the ship each with a nice new watch.

Thursday night we went to a party at the HQ Sergeant's mess, more VINHO and VIVA PORTUGAL and singing. We were properly tired that night. On Friday night we went to the Officers' mess where we had another marvellous dinner with iced LAURENTINA beer from Africa. The best thing was the African soldiers' orchestra which played to us all night, lovely music with soft rhythm and many popular tunes. We have been feted so much that we shall have to go to AINARO in a few days for a holiday. Saturday night we went to a concert party put on by the artillery unit, it was very good and even if we did laugh in the wrong places we provided amusement for all.

Must now go and post this on board the QUANZA.

## Conclusion

On 29 January 1946 Keith Davis noted: 'Took 1000th photograph with Timforce [Timor Force]'.<sup>12</sup> These images along with 66 artworks by Charles Bush related to the Timor campaign were deposited in the AWM collection. All of the photographs and a small number of the artworks have been digitised and are available for download from the AWM website.

The photographic and artistic contributions of these two men significantly add to the historical archive of the campaign not only by providing visual records of the places where the Australians lived and fought but also of some of the Timorese creolos and Portuguese nationals who provided essential support. The success of the MHS patrol to the eastern end of Portuguese Timor is attributable to its being guided by Sergeant George Milsom, who through his war service in Portuguese Timor was very familiar with the sites visited and depicted by Bush and Davis.

For the descendants of 2/2 veterans like the author, the history of the places

in Timor depicted by Bush and photographed by Davis is put in a more personal context, in that they portray locations that were familiar to the men of the unit and mentioned in historical accounts. Photographic comparisons can be made to assess how much they have changed over 75 years. The paintings, drawings and photographs also help present day visitors to Timor-Leste to find and relate to these locations, including particular buildings (where they still exist).

The value of these items as historical source materials is attested to by the fact they have been utilised as illustrations in all Australian published works on the Second World War in Timor beginning with Bernard Callinan's Independent Company in 1953. Bush's depiction of the 2/2's most notable ambush at Nunamogue was used on the front cover of Christopher Wray's book *Timor 1942*. Permanent and temporary exhibitions on the topic have also used their work; for example the 'Debt of Honour' exhibition staged at the WA Museum in 2012 and the recently re-opened Balibo Fort Veterans' Museum exhibition.

In 2020 the author successfully applied for an Australian Army History Unit Research Grant to prepare for publication *WWII in East Timor – an Australian Army site and travel guide*. He undertook a month-long site survey tour to East Timor (August 2022) and visited most of the locations referred to in this article.

#### Acknowledgement:

Thank you to Liz Milsom (George Milsom's daughter) for making his correspondence and photographs available for publication.

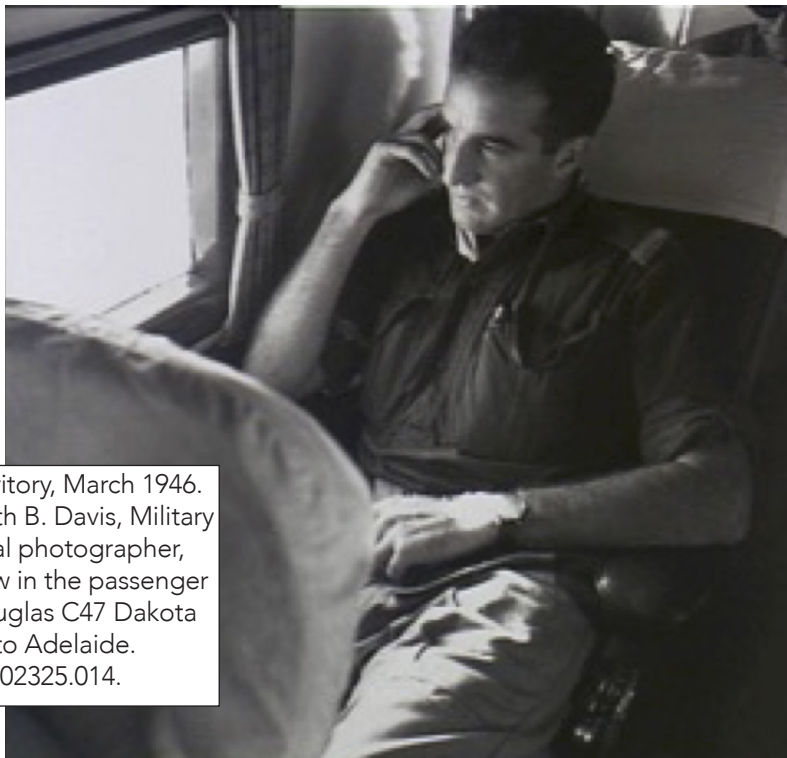


Image 6: Northern Territory, March 1946. VX128381 Sergeant Keith B. Davis, Military History Section official photographer, looking out of a window in the passenger compartment of a Douglas C47 Dakota aircraft en route to Adelaide. Source: AWM P02325.014.



## **'I'm Going to be Shot': The United Nations War Crime Commission, Case No. UK1B/154. Charges against Italian War Criminals, 28 May 1946**

**Ken Wright<sup>1</sup>**

During April 1944, the 63rd 'Tagliamento' Battalaglone was an operational group of the *Guardia Nazionale Repubblicane*. A ferocious fascist unit under the command of Colonel Zuccari which occupied the area of Varallo and district. Operating between Autumn of 1943 and spring of 1945 this unit was responsible for the deaths of many partisans and civilians.

At this time several Allied prisoners of war were hiding in the countryside dressed in civilian clothes. As a result of Partisan activities several roundups took place in the Varallo district which caused the capture of three prisoners of war and several civilians on 9 April. The three Allied soldiers were, British Gunner Fred Miller, Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, Corporal William Brown, 2nd Highland Light Infantry and Australian Private James [Mick] McCracken, 2/24th Infantry Battalion.

How McCracken came to be in Varallo began in July 1942 when German and Italian forces reached El Alamein in Egypt about 70 miles from Alexandria. The war in North Africa had become critical for the British Eighth Army so the Australian 9th Division was rushed from Syria to the El Alamein area and held the northern sector for almost four months as the Eighth Army was re-enforced for an offensive under a new commander. Australian troops carried out five attacks during July as part of the Eighth Army operations and in one, Private McCracken was among many captured during an assault by his battalion and both the 2/23rd and the 2/48th battalions on German positions immediately northeast of Tel el Eisa.

2/24th Battalion War Diary. 22 July 42. 0530hrs. A and C Companies attack and capture objectives according to schedule but suffer severely from heavy artillery, mortar, and machine gun fire particularly from the flanks. This only means of closing or protecting the flanks was by concentrations of artillery and MG fire on disclosed positions. But owing to the difficulty of locating the enemy positions and weakened by heavy casualties, they were ordered to withdraw.

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Wright worked as a publisher's sales representative and served in the Army Reserve. He has taken up writing in retirement.

0645hrs. Withdrawal commences and is carried out in an orderly manner under cover of close artillery support. The bearing and morale of the troops despite heavy casualties was of the highest order.<sup>2</sup>

McCracken was now 'in the bag' as a prisoner of war. He, like all POWs, was at the mercy of their captors—helpless victims of something that went wrong on the battlefield. During World War Two, a minority managed to escape, but for most, it was a matter of enduring hardships for an unknown period in a prison camp in a foreign country. Most Australians found the further one was taken behind the Italian lines, the more the military calibre of the Italian officers and guards deteriorated. Nearly all guards were conscripts, involved in an imperialistic war which few of them believed in, they were far from home, even in Italy, and were generally viewed as poor types.

McCracken and many other POWs were transported to a secondary camp just east of Benghazi called the 'Palms' or the 'Palm Tree' camp. It was positioned in a small wadi with steep sides about fifty yards wide and three hundred and fifty yards long with thickly planted tall shady date palms. There were two main compounds with barbed wire lining the tops of the gully sides. Here the guards were able to observe everything that was going on in the camp. There was no sand and men slept on hard rock with a thin layer of dirt with sewage seeping down into the central sleeping and eating area leaving a constant stench. Here the commandant and his men exercised complete control over the tired, hungry, thirsty and demoralised prisoners, and treated them however they pleased. It would seem to the POWs that the Geneva Convention rule book had been thrown away by the Italians. Although the camp itself covered about five acres, there was a much larger one closer to Benghazi that housed several thousand men of all nationalities.

In mid-August 1942, some six thousand POWs including McCracken, began embarking on two ships in Benghazi harbour for the journey into captivity in Italy. The ships were the *Sestriere* and the brand-new *Nino Bixio*. The embarkation procedure was such that POW's whose names began with A-L were allotted to the *Sestriere* and those from M-Z to the *Nino Bixio*. By 16 August loading was complete and the ships left Benghazi Harbour bound for Italy. They were escorted by two destroyers, the *Da Rocca* and the *Saetta*, and two motor torpedo boats. Neither transport ship was marked as carrying prisoners or displayed any Red Cross identification or lettering.

On that same day, the Royal Navy submarine *Turbulent* (formerly the *Trieste*) commanded by Lieutenant Commander 'Tubby' Linton, VC, was on patrol off Navarino. About three o'clock that afternoon, the convoy was sighted and despite its protective cover, Linton attacked firing a spread of three torpedoes narrowly missing the *Sestriere* but hitting the *Nino Bixio* in number one forward hold, the engine room

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2 2/24th Australian Infantry Battalion War Diary, 22 July 1942, AWM52, 8/3/24.

amidships and one torpedo glancing off the rudder doing enough damage to render it useless. The torpedo that hit number one hold burst through the skin of the ship and exploded inside.

Of the three hundred Australian, New Zealand and South African prisoners crammed into this hold, less than half survived. Fortunately, the ship did not sink. The Saetta took the stricken Nino Bixio in tow and beached her in the harbour at Navarino. The survivors were kept on the ship for four days to retrieve as many dead as practical and to identify them if possible. During this period a few Italian army biscuits served as their only food, but, as a survivor put it, 'everyone was too dazed by the shock to worry about food'.<sup>3</sup>

After a short stay at Corinth, the uninjured were shipped to Bari in Italy, where they entered Campo 75, then being used as a main transit camp for British prisoners from North Africa. From here many were sent to Campo concentramento di prigionieri di guerra numero 57, 'Gruppignano', better known as Campo 57, located at Udine in the north-east corner of Italy. This camp was established on a large flat piece of ground of a river plain surrounded by the snow-capped Dolomites Mountain range and was approximately 25 miles south of the Austrian border, ten miles from the Yugoslav border and 35 miles north of Trieste. The camp was divided into six compounds which had double walled wooden huts about eighty feet long set on concrete foundations. The huts had two tiered wooden bunks in batches of eight. Although water was plentiful with basic ablutions facilities outside the huts, barely adequate latrines available and drainage became a permanent problem. Food was much the same as all the other camps and during the freezing winters, prisoners had to do with one double and one single blanket. The camp was run by Colonel Vittorio Emanuele Calcaterra of the Carabinieri [short for Arma dei Carabinieri-Italian Military Police] who had been one of Mussolini's right-hand men. With his fascist Carabinieri, he had been appointed by Rome headquarters to run this large camp of unruly prisoners and new arrivals were made very aware this was his camp and everything was going to be done his way or else and was operated on a regime of brutal punishment and fear. However, the camp was run more efficiently than most other Italian POW camps and was inspected regularly by the Red Cross. The Red Cross food parcels arrived on a regular basis and included in the parcels were fifty cigarettes which was the 'currency' of the camp. The Red Cross also supplied books, sporting gear and medical supplies but in many cases the latter were held back or used by the Italian guards. Many POWs said that they owe their survival to these food parcels. With the Allied invasion of Sicily, the situation in Italy was to about to change and was to have a dramatic affect on the camps and the Italians in general.

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3 See Spence Edge and Jim Henderson, *No Honour, No Glory*, Collins, Auckland, 1983.

Code named Operation *Husky*, the British Eighth Army on 10 July 1943 under General Bernard Montgomery came ashore on the southeast of Sicily while the US Seventh Army under General George Patton landed on Sicily's south coast and six days later the American Fifth Army under General Mark Clarke landed at Salerno. The invasion of Sicily led to the collapse of Benito Mussolini's fascist government and his arrest and imprisonment at the Imperatore Hotel in the Abruzzo Mountains.

The new Italian government under Marshall Pietro Badoglio began seeking surrender terms and on 3 September, after discussions in Lisbon and Sicily the military terms of the 'Short Armistice' was signed between General Castellano on behalf of the Italian government and General Bedell Smith representing General Dwight Eisenhower, Commander of all Allied Forces in the Mediterranean area. 'A Long Armistice', expanding the military terms to cover political, economic, and financial clauses, was subsequently signed in Malta on 29 September. In both versions of the armistice, it was agreed that all POWs and internees confined, interned, or detached in any other manner on Italian territory occupied by the Italians, shall be immediately handed over to the Allies and no one shall be transferred to Germany. For most Allied POWs in Italy, it was already too late! Fully aware of their former Italian comrades plans to capitulate, the Supreme German Command moved swiftly and began 'Operation Alarico', which covered the liberation of Mussolini, the occupation of Rome, the seizure of the Italian navy, the elimination of the Italian army and the occupation of all the key positions. These moves enabled Mussolini to re-establish his fascist government in northern Italy with the backing of German forces totalling approximately 100,000 men with a further 18 German divisions arriving soon after.

Almost immediately after the promulgation of the Armistice, the Germans rounded up the inmates of the larger POW camps as Gruppignano and Sulmona and were moving steadily to mop up the smaller camps and more isolated working camps. Under the terms of the armistice, instructions were issued by the Italians that all Allied prisoners were to remain where they were until they were released. In Campo 57 when the announcement was made there was great jubilation amongst all the prisoners, but the brief joy soon changed to bitter disappointment when the Italian guards were replaced by German ones. One prisoner in Campo 57 describes the dramatic introduction to their new masters: 'A German Officer announced we were now prisoners of the German Army and any person who tried to escape would be shot. They gave us a graphic demonstration of how accurate they were with their Spandau machine gun by shooting out the windows of a nearby elevated sentry box. The message was quite clear. We had just exchanged one brutal regime for another'.

During Campo 57's operation it was policy for many POWs to be drafted out to Campo 106 at Vercelli, the provincial capital and from here they were sent to work on 29 assorted sized farms in the area. At the time of the armistice announcement, most prisoners simply stayed where they were, not realising the Germans were about to take control. However, many other POWs simply walked out when the Italian guards left them to their own devices. All told in what the biggest mass escape in military history with some 20,000 Allied POWs temporarily 'on the loose' in Italy. Some went south and made it safely to Allied lines and some stayed 'underground' in Italy. Most were recaptured by the Germans, but 5,139 crossed the Alps to the sanctuary of neutral Switzerland. These included 420 Australians and 108 New Zealanders.<sup>4</sup>

Any soldier who attempted to escape had to endure extreme hardships to survive in a very harsh environment. They had none of a prison camp's minor luxuries, such as Red Cross food parcels, nor did they get letters from home or have a chance of letting their loved ones know how they were getting along. They had to live off the land and were harassed and hunted by the enemy and lived in the knowledge that weighed heavily on them that any of the local population who help them to survive ran a very real risk of savage retribution by the Germans or Fascist troops loyal to Mussolini. In addition, they had to live with the fear that there were those who would willingly turn against another human being and betray them to the authorities. Some POWs, for one reason or another, decided to join the Italian resistance movement rather than try to make it to freedom.

The Allied landings in Sicily in July followed by the landing on the mainland had a profound effect on the Italian population. The Battle of Stalingrad had destroyed the myth of the invincibility of the German army and the benefit of the Axis military co-operation forever. Well before the rise of Mussolini and his Fascist Italian Social Republic, the workers in the north were beginning to assert themselves. Communism had taken deep root there and political agitation was commonplace and growing. The strong movement towards 'National Liberation' transcended party, political, and religious interests. Partisan activity was carried out by individuals and groups who were literally fighting for their own homes and their war became personal rather than political. Others were divided along political lines or were ardently anti-Fascist irrespective of other loyalties.

The Italian partisans fought both the German occupying forces and Mussolini's fascists and over time, about 300,000 or more armed fighters—among them 35,000 women—took part in the fighting. The exact figure is unknown but an estimated 39 Australians who had escaped from captivity died fighting with them.

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4 Bill Rudd, *AIF in Switzerland*, self-published, Melbourne, 2000. This memoir contains a nominal roll of POW (freemen) who escaped capture, a map of European prison camps, and stories of capture, transportation and treatment as POWs and escape.



McCracken joined the resistance movement in February 1944 and took part in fighting around Milan, but in early April was among those captured in or near Varallo-northeast of Milan by soldiers from the 63 Legione Tagliamento Battalion of the *Guardia Nazionale Repubblicane*. Battaglione Legione Tagliamento was an operational group of the Guardia Nazionale Repubblicane.

In a room inside the municipal school in Varallo that the *Guardia Nazionale Repubblicane* used as a prison were approximately 30 civilian prisoners. Two British soldiers in civilian clothes were handcuffed together and an Australian soldier, also dressed as a civilian was also handcuffed. At about 2am on 15 April, 23 prisoners were individually taken into another room, and they were informed by Captain Ventorini that by order of Colonel Merico Zuccari, commandant of the Legione Tagliamento, they were all to be shot for being members of a partisan group. Zuccari was a notorious Fascist, wanted for numerous war crimes in the north of Italy. He was also on the wanted list of the Italian government for political crimes.

They were given Holy Communion at 6am by the Legione Tagliamento's IL Capellano's chaplain, Father Antonio Intreccialagli. All were then allowed to write a last letter to their respective homes, and these were collected by the chaplain to be forwarded. At 11.30am, only nine of the original 23 men sentenced to death were escorted with their hands bound behind their backs to a wall just outside the cemetery by 50 soldiers of the 63 Tagliamento Battalion. The firing squad consisting of 18 soldiers and a sergeant in command faced the prisoners. An officer arrived—possibly Captain Fabbri—and suggested they would not be shot if they were to join the *Guardia Nazionale Repubblicane*. All refused and the sergeant in charge was given the order to carry out the executions. Each man was shot in the back in the region of the heart. The officer went round and shot each prisoner in the head with his pistol. The bodies were then interned in the cemetery.

Private James McCracken's final letter was addressed to his brother in Melbourne, Australia and when it finally arrived, he read his brothers word's.

My dear Pop,

Just a line to tell you that I will not see you again as I am going to be shot by the fascist in Varallo this morning. Would you let Mrs Beggs know what has happened to me please, also I left my alloppe 3 with Phyllis at Ballarat so you can do what you want with it now. I hope you are all well just at present so give my love to all the Beggs also Gwen and my girl friend Phyllis and hoping she will be happy without me being there with her. I am with two English boys, and they are going with me. I hope you got that letter that I wrote to you a fair while ago. How is Melbourne. I suppose it is just as bad as ever.

Lots of love to you all from your loving brother.

Mick. Goodbye. xxxxx xxxxxx<sup>5</sup>

The Italian chaplain added the following to the following to the three condemned soldiers' letters.

Just a few words to tell you that your brother was shot because he was caught and arrested in civilian clothes. I assure you that he received the comfort of our religion and died in peace.'

The Reverend Father  
[Signed] Antonio Intreccialagli.  
IL Cappellano.<sup>6</sup>

The two English boys McCracken mentions in his letter as 'going with him' sent their final letters. Gunner Fred Miller sent his letter to his brother in Retford, Nottinghamshire, England:

Dear Brother,

Am being shot in quarter of an hour's time. I was caught in civilian clothes and am being shot in the back for it. Give my love to all at Retford. Remember me to Elsie and also Harry.  
Love with my last wishes,

Your loving brother [Sgn] Fred 847083 Sig Miller.F.

P.S. I hope this war will soon be over and you will have peace in England and always be happy and content in Retford.<sup>7</sup>

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5 War service records, NAA B883, 2002/5080133.

'Alloppo'. Possibly a nickname for a family possession or could mean 'allotted' pay.

6 Letter from McCracken to McCracken, National Archives (NA) UK, WO 311/1234.

7 Letter from Miller to Miller, NA WO 311/1234.

Corporal William Brown wrote to his parents in Partick, Glasgow, Scotland.

Dear Mother & Father & Family,

This is the last letter I will be able to write as I get shot today. Dear family, I have laid down my life for my country and everything that was dear to me. I hope this war will be over soon so that you will all have peace for ever. Goodbye, Father, Mother, Jim, Davie, Flora, Maurice, Harry, Charlie.

Your ever-loving soldier son and brother.  
Willie.<sup>8</sup>

According to IL Cappellano Intreccialagli's own correspondence in 1993, he handed the 'exterminated' men's letters to Cardinal Vassalli Rocco who was visiting wounded Italian soldiers in Bologna. It is not clear in the translation if he told the cardinal the three were not wearing uniforms and that they were dressed in civilian clothes or merely making a statement in his correspondence. He went on to say the military court ordered their execution and that in the letters to their families, they acknowledged they had violated the rules of war by participating in a war in civilian clothes. This is plain rubbish as only one victim said was that he was caught in civilian clothes and nothing more. The good father goes on to say that the night before the execution, he had celebrated Mass for them for which they praised him for his help during their imprisonment. Intreccialagli was certainly not averse to self-promotion and justification for his part in the murders and added a bit more to his self importance when he said that he was extremely useful to Allied Control when he had to answer 'false' to the accusations by partisans about the sentencing to death of these former enemies.

After the war, the Allied Control was the United Nations War Crimes Commission (British National Office) who wanted to prosecute Zuccari, Captain, and Ventorini for murder for violating the laws and usages of war contrary to regulation 2 of the Geneva Convention.

Even if the chaplain of 63 Battalion Tagliamento had attempted to save the condemned men, the hatred between fascist and partisan would have been enough to cause the deaths of the three Allied soldiers and for their families and friends to suffer so much anguish. McCracken's letter summarised it all: 'Just a line to let you know, I'm going to be shot'.

After the war, the three allied soldiers who were buried in the Varallo cemetery were later re-interred in the British War Cemetery in Milan.

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<sup>8</sup> Letter from Brown to Brown, NA WO 311/1234.

# Recognition of ADF service to the United Nations in Indonesia 1947-1951

Graham Rayner<sup>1</sup>

Between 1947 and 1951 officers of the Australian Defence Force joined military officers from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium and China as observers for the United Nations (UN) as it negotiated with The Netherlands and the newly declared Republic of Indonesia to find a lasting resolution of their conflict over the Netherlands East Indies. To date, the UN has not formally recognised the service of these officers. This article explains the UN's involvement in the Netherlands East Indies, now Indonesia; how the ADF became involved; the work that officers performed; and what avenues the UN might take in recognising their service.

## Background

Taking advantage of the turmoil surrounding the end of the Second World War, Indonesia declared its independence from The Netherlands on 17 August 1945. After the Japanese had invaded the archipelago in 1942 the Netherlands East Indies government had withdrawn, seeking refuge in Australia, but returned in early 1946, against the wishes of Indonesian republicans. Escalating tension and fighting, mainly centred on the islands of Sumatra and Java, took its toll and the Royal Netherlands Army was despatched to the archipelago to assist the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army.

By mid-1947 the attention of the fledgling United Nations had become focused on the conflict, referring to it as 'The Indonesian Question'. On 1 August 1947 the Security Council made its first call on the belligerents, ordering a ceasefire and the opening of dialogue to resolve the dispute.<sup>2</sup> On 25 August the Security

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1 Graham Rayner is a naval architect, member of the ACT branch of the MHSA and for 11 years was a member of the organising committee for the construction of the Australian Peacekeeping memorial in Canberra. His biography of Commander Henry Chesterman RAN, a member of the first contingent of peacekeepers to deploy to Indonesia, was published in *Peacekeeper*, the magazine of the Australian Peacekeeper and Peacemaker Veterans Association. In 2022 Rayner made a recommendation to the current federal government that it seeks the UN's approval of the award of the UN Medal to ADF personnel who served in Indonesia between 1947 and 1951. This is under active consideration.

2 UN Security Council, Resolution 27, [www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/resolutions-adopted-security-council-1947](http://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/resolutions-adopted-security-council-1947). Accessed 28 October 2022.



Image 1: Captain Dhoste (France, in sunglasses) with Major Sands (UK, centre) and Colonel Morizon (France, wearing kepi) investigating an incident at Salatiga in central Java. Source alamy.com and Netherlands Archive 2.24.04.01/755

Council tendered 'its good offices to the parties in order to assist in the pacific settlement of their dispute' and called upon the consuls of member states represented in Batavia to report to the Security Council on the situation.<sup>3</sup> Thereby were created two organs of the UN: the Committee of Good Offices on the Indonesian Question (known widely but unofficially as the UNGOC); and the Consular Commission at Batavia.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the best efforts of the organs, the conflict continued without long term resolution, and therefore on 28 January 1949 the Security Council significantly increased the functions of the Committee of Good Offices, with additional powers, and declared that 'it would henceforth be known as the UN Commission for Indonesia'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, a third organ of the UN was created on the Indonesian Question: United Nations Commission for Indonesia (UNCI).<sup>6</sup> The UNCI (and UNGOC

3 UN Security Council, Resolutions 30 and 31.

4 *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council*, Chapter 5, 'Subsidiary Organs of the Security Council', United Nations (continuous publication), pp. 183-184.

5 UN Security Council, Resolution 67.

6 *Repertoire*, p 185.



before it) was the primary organ of the UN operating within Indonesia, with the Consular Commission requested by the Security Council to ‘facilitate the work of the UNCI by providing military observers and other staff and facilities’.<sup>7</sup> Although the UNCI and Consular Commission have never been formally terminated, their work had effectively ended by April 1951.

Image 2: Intense discussions between Dutch and Indonesian officers at Djamboe, central Sumatra February 1949, with UN observers looking on (French Capitaine Dhoste on left and Colonel Morizon 2nd from left).

Source: Netherlands Archives 2.24.04.03/1516-3-2.



### **The Call for Military Observers**

At its first meeting, on 2 September 1947, the Consular Commission at Batavia unanimously agreed that it needed the help of military officers to carry out its work, and each of the six member states – Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, and China – represented in the country by their consuls despatched a team.<sup>8</sup>

The six national teams initially worked independently of each other reporting to their own consuls but coming together to compare notes. As the weeks

<sup>7</sup> UN Security Council, Resolution 67.

<sup>8</sup> In the first few months the terms ‘military officers’, ‘military assistants’ and ‘military observers’ were used, after which they were referred to almost exclusively as military observers.

passed however, it became clear that a collaborative approach to the work was needed. This was soon confirmed with the arrival in country of the Committee of Good Offices (UNGOC) in early December 1947. UNGOC established a support arrangement for its dialogue with Republican and Netherlands representatives, whereby it was given guidance by several committees: political, economic, social affairs and security. The Consular Commission's military team leaders were formed into an executive board which reported to the security committee of UNGOC.



Image 3: Squadron Leader Hackshall (Australia), with Indonesian military, standing next to his UN observer group's jeep on the Status Quo Line. Source: AWM P03170.009.

### **The Work of the Military Observers**

The initial work of the military observers was to help the Consular Commission assess the state of the fighting across the country and report back to the Security Council. However, their long-term value was recognised immediately by the members of UNGOC. After the first ceasefire agreement brokered by the UN was reached on 17 January 1948 (the Renville Agreement, or Truce Agreement, named after USS *Renville*, where the negotiations were carried out in Batavia harbour), the observers were deployed by UNGOC to monitor the agreed terms of the truce, maintain a visible and impartial presence to the belligerent parties and investigate any breaches of the truce conditions by either party. The observers were under direct control of the UNGOC and Consular Commission. When the observers first arrived in Indonesia they were given very little guidance. They were relied upon to use their own initiative based on their recent experience in the Second World War. By March 1948 they had enough collective wisdom to document their work and on 22 March the military executive board of UNGOC issued MILEXBOARD

Directive 4 which provided guidance on how all military officers were to carry out their functions (an extract is shown in Annex A). Directive 4 remained in effect throughout the UN's involvement in 'The Indonesian Question' and was essential guidance to every member of the military observer group. An annex to Directive 4 listing the disposition of the observer group around the archipelago was periodically updated.



Image 4: Major Andrew Smith (Australia) and Lieutenant Pierre (USA) meet two Indonesian officers.  
Source: Netherlands Archive 2.24.04.01/6364



Image 5: Capitaine Rousset (Fr) and Colonel Mollinger (USA) confer with Republican Colonel Simbolon near Palembang, east Java January 1948.  
Source: Alamy.com.

## Recognition by the United Nations

No recognition of the service given by the military observers to the UN in Indonesia has been found. Two avenues for suitable recognition are the UN Medal and UN Medal for Special Service.

### UN Medal

The UN Medal was established in 1959 with the Secretary-General's promulgation of 'Regulations for the United Nations Medal', of which the first revision (February 1966) remains extant.<sup>9</sup> The medal is to be awarded 'to military officers who are or have been in the service of the United Nations', and the Secretary-General 'shall designate the United Nations organs in respect of which the medal ... shall be awarded'. The regulations do not specify what type of service is relevant. This was reinforced and clarified by the Under Secretary General the Peacekeeping Operations in 1994 by the issue of cable #3797 of 16 November 1994.

The UN Medal has been awarded for service to many UN organs since its establishment in 1959. However, the Secretary General has also designated organs created before 1959 service to which would attract eligibility for the award of the UN Medal. All such organs involve, or involved, military observers deployed by member states. Typical of the organs are:

UNMOGIP: Military Observer Group for India and Pakistan  
(April 1948–ongoing)

UNTSO: Truce Supervision Organisation (May 1948–ongoing)

ONUC: Force in the Congo (July 1960–June 1964)

UNTEA: Temporary Executive Authority in West New Guinea  
(October 1962–May 1963)

UNSF: Security Force in West New Guinea (October 1962–May 1963)

UNTOM: Yemen Observation Group (July 1963–September 1964)

UNFICYP: Force in Cyprus (March 1964–ongoing)

The work of the military observers who served, or are serving organs in India, Pakistan, the Middle East, Yemen and Cyprus is essentially the same as the work of observers who served the UN in Indonesia.

### UN Medal for Special Service

The UN Medal for Special Service 'was established in June 1995 to recognise those personnel serving the United Nations in capacities other than established peace-keeping missions and [other than] the United Nations Headquarters'. Furthermore,

<sup>9</sup> UN document ST/SGB/119/Rev 1.

<sup>10</sup> UN website <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/united-nations-medals>. Accessed on 31 October 2022.

‘the Medal for Special Service may be awarded to eligible personnel ... for which no other UN medal is authorised’.<sup>10</sup>

The UN Medal for Special Service has been awarded to personnel who served organs of the UN involved in mine clearance, refugee assistance, humanitarian affairs, and support to special representatives of the Secretary General. A review of the UN organs established in Indonesia demonstrates that the work of the military observers serving those organs is in keeping with the work of military observers in India and Pakistan, the Middle East, Cyprus and Yemen, and hence the UN Medal is more appropriate.

## Conclusion

The United Nations’ involvement in Indonesia is arguably one of the organisation’s greatest and most enduring success stories. It is certainly its earliest success story. The efforts of the UN to broker a resolution, monitor ceasefires, and maintain a presence, ultimately led to The Hague Agreement on 1 November 1949 which ended the conflict. Negotiations at The Hague were assisted by the UN Commission for Indonesia. The agreement was ratified by the Indonesian legislature on 14 December and by the Netherlands parliament on 21 December. Thus, the sovereignty of the previous Netherlands East Indies (excluding West New Guinea) was passed to the Republic of the United States of Indonesia on 21 December 1949.

The UN maintained its presence in Indonesia for another year, monitoring the observance of the conditions of The Hague Agreement, including the disbandment of the Royal Netherlands East Indies Army (70,000 personnel) and the repatriation of the 60,000 members of the Royal Netherlands Army. The number of UN military observers was reduced over this time and by early April 1951 all had returned to their home countries. In its final report to the Security Council, dated 3 April 1951, the UNCI noted that it had no further items on its agenda and therefore, whilst ‘continuing to hold itself at the disposal of the parties’, would adjourn sine die (without an appointed date to resume work).<sup>11</sup>

The UN’s work in Indonesia was pivotal in bringing to an end the fighting between the armies of The Netherlands



Image 6: created image by the author of a UN Medal with a proposed ribbon, reflecting the colours of both the Indonesian and Dutch flags.

<sup>11</sup> UN document S/2087.



and Indonesia, helping to minimise further bloodshed. At the forefront of the UN's presence was the military observer group, and therefore the military service provided by these officers to the three organs of the UN should attract the award of the UN Medal.

A list of all ADF personnel who served the UN in Indonesia is shown in Table 1. The list was compiled primarily from files held in the National Archives of Australia, reinforced by publicly available information. Missing data and confirmation of the existing data can only be provided through a review of individual officers' personal files held by Defence Archives.

## ANNEX A

Extract from MILEX Directive 4 issued 22 March 1948

### A. GENERAL INFORMATION:

.....

#### 2. Organisation of the Conference:

#### c. The Military Executive Board:

.....

It is a cardinal principle that the personnel assigned for duty as Military Assistants and Observers with the GOC shall do nothing which in any way might jeopardise or even embarrass the mission of the GOC. The GOC Mission, on behalf of the United Nations Security Council, is to assist the Netherlands and the Republic in every possible way to reach a peaceful and fair solution of the problems confronting these two parties. *Officers so employed are in fact representatives of the United Nations* [emphasis added].

.....

### B. FUNCTIONS OF THE MILITARY OBSERVERS (MILOBS):

#### 1. General:

The general mission of the Milobs is to observe, in the field, the implementation of the military aspects of the Truce Agreement of 17 January 1948, to assist local commanders of both sides to reach agreements on these matters and to report to MILEX their observations, actions and recommendations on the above and such other matters as may be specifically assigned by MILEX.

.....

## C. METHOD OF WORK:

### 1. Milobs Teams:

#### a. Organisation:

.....

#### b. Principal Duties:

- (1) To supervise demarcation of the demilitarized zones and the location of police posts and of military outposts both on maps and in the field.
- (2) Observation of the civil police forces in the demilitarized zones, as outlined in the Netherlands and Republican "Regulations for Police Forces".
- (3) Observe communication (wire and radio) between the Netherlands and Republican field commanders and civil authorities, with reference to efficiency thereof, frequency of traffic and other pertinent data.
- (4) Assist in opening lines of communication for vehicular traffic. Transportation facilities in general with particular reference to the implementation of agreements for the repair of roads, bridges, etc. Observation of the control of traffic and trade.
- (5) Conduct enquiries and investigations into local incidents of military character occurring in the demilitarized zones at the request of one of the parties.
- (6) To undertake other duties as instructed by [UN]GOC.

#### c. Policy:

- (1) Military Assistants will refrain from issuing an order or appearing to do so. It is emphasised that the [UN]GOC does not possess this authority, and accordingly, none of its representatives has such a right. Observers can best serve their duty by emphasising that their function is to assist in bringing both parties into agreement through the use of initiative, a sense of fair play, ingenuity and common sense – in other words, the basic instruments of the Committee of Good Offices. ....
- (2) Observers should avoid discussion of political, civil or economic matters outside their terms of reference, unless otherwise specifically authorised by MILEX. ....
- (3) Teams normally will act as units. While officers do not necessarily remain in each other's company on all occasions, they should agree on programs of individual action and when these actions are completed, agree on decisions and further courses of action. .... Regardless of the need for separate operations, the team officers will arrange for proper contact at all times with local commanders of both parties.
- (4) Teams will visit both sides of the Status Quo Line and in general will divide the time equally, except that local agreements can be made for

spending more time with one party than another where it seems advisable. Care will be taken to insure that immediate communication is maintained between Milobs and the commanders on either side of the line. ....

**Table 1: ADF personnel posted to Indonesia in the service of UN 1947-1951**  
Officers who served for more than 90 days continuously, and hence may be eligible for the UN Medal.

Aitken	Edward Fawcett	LTCOL	337680, VX15141?	29-Nov-49	20-Mar-51
Baird	John Rupert	CAPT	VX104334	19-Feb-48	20-Jun-48
Beames	Walter Bowes		V148093	25-Jun-48	15-Mar-49
Bohle	Alan Henry Moorhouse	CAPT	NX46374?	14-Jul-49	26-Feb-50
Brown	William Frank	CAPT	NX56498	7-Jul-48	11-Feb-49
Buckingham	D.J.F.	CAPT	QX2434		28-May-48
Collins	Thomas John	CAPT	(British p/p)	7-Jul-48	15-Dec-48
Dellow	George Kimpton	CAPT		4-Apr-49	Mar-50?
Denholm	J.L.	CAPT	VX12464		31-Aug-48
Dewar	Robert E.	LTCOL	WX4	~Feb-48	~27-Oct-48
Dolan	C.P.	MAJ		28-Jan-50	25-Sep-50
Ewing	I.R.	CAPT	NX136164		
Godfrey	Ernest John	MAJ	VX98463	4-Apr-49	Oct-49?
Godfrey	C.W.	CAPT	NX138187		31-Aug-48
Hammond	J. M.	CAPT	VX101996		
Heugh	Henry	MAJ		4-Feb-50	4-Aug-50
Hogan	George (Henry?) Coleman	CAPT	NX67530	19-Aug-49	9-Mar-50
Jenkinson	Ross Gordon	MAJ	122, QX6274?	Sep 49?	29-Jan-50
MacDonald	Alec Bath	COL	SX4539, NP10264	25-Jun-48	8-Mar-49
MacLeod	Norman L.	MAJ	VX5673	22-Oct-48	9-Mar-50
MacLeod	Ernest Walter	CAPT	VX54741, WP5910	27-Dec-48 or 25-Jun-48	8-Feb-49
Marshall	Charles William	CAPT	WX3624	4-Jul-48	

Mayfield	J.J.T. - Joseph John?	CAPT		10-Mar-49	4-Mar-50
Mummery	Howard Browning	MAJ		10-Mar-49	1-Dec-49
Neylan	Edward Michael	BRIG		9-Dec-47	May-48?
Oldmeadow	David	MAJ		14-Nov-49	May-50?
Patrick MBE	William Kennelly	CAPT	QX700041?	22-Oct-48	Apr-49?
Perry	Charles Wykeham Wil- liam Hubert	MAJ	WX700084	1-Nov-49	
Prior	Claude Esdaile	BRIG	SX1470 (NP10264)	17-Feb-49	10-Aug-50
Resuggan	Francis Edward	MAJ	NX204	6-Dec-49	30-Mar-50
Smith	I.H.	CAPT	QX6482		11-Jun-48
Smith	Andrew Cliff	MAJ	VX700041	10-Mar-49	20-Oct-49
Strickland	Charles Edwin	MAJ	NX8442 (NAA)	28-Apr-49	Jun-49
Williams	Gerald Claude	CAPT	(British p/p)	7-Jul-48	18-Mar-49
Wolpert	Harold Emanuel	CAPT		8-Apr-49	29-Jul-49
Chesterman	Henry Swinfield	CMDR		13-Sep-47	19-Jan-48
Mather	Allan Clive	CMDR		10-Aug-48	30-Jan-49
Addison	W.	SQNLDR	405707	29-Oct-49	26-Dec-50
Addison	D.S.	SQNLDR	1210, 03188	Sep-49	12-Mar-50
Arnold	C.L.	SQNLDR	415107	Sep-49	16-Mar-50
Burdeu	P. (Percival) C	SQNLDR	452	29-Oct-49	26-Mar-50
Crowther	J.R. or T.R.	SQNLDR	401323	29-Oct-49	22-Dec-50
DeLacy	R.E.	FLTLT	3065	15-Feb-48	4-Apr-48
Emslie	Alexander Ronald	WGCDR	548 (O395)	15-Feb-48	26-Jun-48
Fairbank	Royston James	SQNLDR	4120	20-Feb-48	5-Jul-48
Fenton	R.B.	SQNLDR	423694	24-Mar-49	~12-Feb-49
Green	Redmond A	GPCAPT	146	15-Feb-48	5-Jul-48
Hackshall	Reginald	FLTLT	3481	29-Jun-48	~12-Feb-49
Ker	A.I.	SQNLDR	419615	24-Mar-49	17-Nov-49
Knights	A.E.	SQNLDR	2965	24-Mar-49	4-Nov-49
Kroll	Leslie Norman	SQNLDR	404615	2-Dec-47	16-Feb-48
Mann	Kenneth Alan Seymour	FLTLT	402377		29-May-48
McCormack	A.O.	WGCDR	376	25-Jun-48	Apr-49?
Medley	S.C.	SQNLDR	4640	Sep-49	16-Mar-50
Milburn	A.J.	SQNLDR	4248	24-Mar-49	10-Nov-49
Nichol		SQNLDR	3485	24-Mar-49	13-Nov-49

Norris		SQNLDR	2940	29-Jun-48	8-Feb-49
Page		SQNLDR	407623	29-Jun-48	1-Aug-48
Roland		SQNLDR	1026	29-Oct-49	14-Sep-50
Sharpley		SQNLDR	1872	29-Jun-48	23-Dec-48
Sugden		SQNLDR	406887, O5813	29-Oct-49	12-Mar-50
Chapman	Officers who served in Indonesia for less than 90 days			13-Sep to 11-Oct-47	8-Nov to 9-Dec-47
Dyke	Lewis Glanville Howard	BRIG	VX89, SP15249	13-Sep-47	11-Oct-47
Ridley	C.A.	MAJ	NX70165, NP9981	mid- Feb-48	4-Apr-48
Spence	Louis Thomas	SQNLDR	270839, O11315	13-Sep-47	3-Oct-47



Image 7: UNCI observers at mass gathering Solo stadium November 1949.

Source: Netherlands Archive 2.24.04.02/922.



Image 8: Colonel Meyers (USA, right) talking with Dutch soldiers. October 1947. Source: Netherlands Archive 2.24.04.02/3726.



# 'Australia's Blueprint for Economic Warfare in the Second World War': The War Book of the Commonwealth of Australia 1939

Rohan Goyne

This article will examine the War Book of the Commonwealth of Australia 1939 Edition (The War Book),<sup>1</sup> and its place in the pantheon of the Australia's military history of the Second World War. The study of Australian military history in particular the nations preparedness for war in 1939 is incomplete without analysis of the War Book and its impact.

Whilst researching this article I located an original numbered copy of the War Book (No 79) held by the National Library of Australia (NLA) as part of the national collection. Subsequently, its entry on Trove confirms that the NLA has tagged No 79 for testing for conservation attention as it may be the only remaining original copy of the War Book. If it is confirmed as the only remaining original numbered copy, then its significance as a primary document of the nation's history of the Second World War is reinforced.<sup>2</sup> As a Petherick Reader of the NLA, the location of No 79 reinforces to me that there are many potential undiscovered treasures in the state and national libraries.

*The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* (2ed) notes the War Book as 'a detailed statement of action to be taken by government departments on the outbreak of war, was begun within the Department of Defence in 1938, though discussion papers of a similar nature had been prepared in 1927 and 1928. Modelled on the British War Book, it set out measures required at each stage of the process of moving from peace to war, but it did not deal with the conduct of the war itself ... Similar volumes were prepared by the State governments and by each fighting service'.<sup>3</sup>

As an example of the State War Books, 'The NSW State War Book 1939' was based on the Commonwealth War Book and complementary to it. Each NSW government agency received a copy of the NSW War Book which concerned emergency procedures specific for that agency and the general provisions to be used during a time of crisis.<sup>4</sup>

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1 'War Book of the Commonwealth of Australia', Department of Defence, Melbourne, 1939.

2 Editor's note: this is not the case. Copies are held by National Archives.

3 P. Dennis, J. Grey, et al, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, Oxford University Press, 2009, pp. 151-152.

4 NRS – 12174, NSW State Archives and Records site. Accessed 10 February 2020.

July, 1939.]

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Part II.—Chapter IV.

## Part II.—WAR STAGE.

## CHAPTER IV.—ARMY MEASURES—(continued).

Main action to be taken by Departments primarily concerned. (1)	Important action to be taken by other Departments. (2)	General Observations. (3)
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## 1. MOBILIZATION OF THE ARMY—(continued).

## (A) DECISION TO MOBILIZE AND ORDER TO MOBILIZE—(continued).

DEFENCE SECRETARIAT—  
(continued)—

(3) At the instance of Army Headquarters, transmit to the Prime Minister's Department the draft cablegram informing the Dominions Office of the decision to mobilize, the extent of mobilization ordered, and the estimated time by which the Army will be ready to undertake active operations in Australia.

(4) At the instance of the Finance Branch of Army Headquarters, arrange with the Treasury for the provision of the necessary funds to cover the expenses of Army mobilization—see (f) of column (3).

## ARMY HEADQUARTERS—

(1) If the situation so warrants and time permits, complete the preliminary arrangements for the prospective extent of mobilization, in anticipation of the Government's approval.

(2) Submit to the Minister, for the decision of the Government, a recommendation as to whether, in the opinion of the Chief of the General Staff, a mobilization should be ordered, and if so, the extent of the mobilization considered necessary.

(3) On receipt of the Government's direction to mobilize the Army, arrange for the execution of the pre-arranged plans, to the extent approved.

(4) Inform the Naval and Air Boards of the issue of the order to mobilize.

(5) Submit, through the Defence Secretariat, to the Prime Minister's Department, a draft telegram to the Dominions Office as in Defence Secretariat (3) above.

(6) Arrange with the Treasury, through the Defence Secretariat, for the provision of necessary funds to cover the expenses of mobilization.

## (continued)—

## (d) Notification to Commonwealth Departments and to State Governments.

In order that all Commonwealth Departments may have an official authority to proceed with certain action to be taken in co-operation with the Military Authorities, it is necessary that they be informed immediately of the Government's decision to mobilize.

The State Governments should similarly be notified as they will be concerned with the execution of the mobilization rail movement programme. It is also desired to obtain the co-operation of the State Governments in connexion with the construction of works and assistance by the police.

The responsibility for notifying the decision to mobilize to other Commonwealth Departments and State Governments rests with the Prime Minister's Department.

## (e) Notification to the Dominions Office.

In order that the United Kingdom Government may be aware of the extent of the defence measures adopted throughout the Empire, it is necessary that the Dominions Office be informed, by the Prime Minister's Department, of the decision to mobilize, the extent thereof, and of the estimated time by which the Australian Army will be ready to undertake active operations within Australia. This information will be forwarded by Army Headquarters, through the Defence Secretariat, to the Prime Minister's Department.

## (f) Financial Requirements.

The decision to mobilize will entail a very considerable expenditure of public money, not only for the execution of mobilization and for the provision of the Army's requirements, but also for its pay and maintenance after it has been mobilized. The execution of mobilization cannot be delayed on account of financial formalities, and it is essential, therefore, that it should be realized that the decision of the Government to order a mobilization will automatically authorize the incurring of the necessary expenditure.

Image 1: 'The Commonwealth War Book', 1939, Part II, War Stage, Chapter IV – Army Measures, p. 5.  
Source: NAA J1367, Copy No 35.

An analysis of the contents of the War Book will follow with reference to specific chapters to give an understanding of the breadth of it and to reflect its role as the basic blueprint document to stand up all departments and agencies of the then Commonwealth Government and the economy in anticipation of Australia as a British Dominion entering a war.

## **Chapter XVI: Measures Affecting the Civilian Economy**

In Section 1 Appendix to Chapter XVI, the various departments of the Commonwealth Government were allocated specific responsibilities for every aspect of the civilian economy in the event of war. For example, the Department of Supply was responsible for automotive and motor cycle spare parts; brushware; canvasware; clothing and textiles; cordage and cordage fibres; footwear; leather (distribution); office machines and typewriters; rubber; tinplate utensils (crocery, cutlery, holloware, glass, glassware etc.).

In comparison, the Department of Defence Production was responsible for products including domestic washing machine (production); agricultural machinery and spare parts (production); ball bearings; drums; earthmoving plant and spare parts (production); ferrous and non-ferrous metals; chemicals; forgings and castings; hand tools; internal combustion engines; motor vehicles (production) and refrigerators and spare parts.

Similarly, the Department of Trade was responsible for paper; photographic materials and sugar. the department of national development had responsibility for coal and liquid fuel. the department of interior had responsibility for timber and so on.<sup>5</sup>

Ultimately, the War Book divides up running of all the sectors of the civilian economy between the various government Commonwealth Departments.

## **Chapter XVI, Section 3: Food and Agriculture**

In this section of the War Book the Commonwealth Department of Primary Industry would administer the wartime policy for food and agriculture to achieve the government's stated objectives of: The maintenance of adequate food supplies for the civilian population; the supply of food and agricultural products for – the of Australia and Allied Services and the needs of civilian populations in the United Kingdom and Allied countries.<sup>6</sup>

The War Book envisaged that Australia would supply food and agricultural

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5 'War Book of the Commonwealth of Australia', Chapter XVI, p. 3.

6 'War Book of the Commonwealth of Australia', Chapter XVI, p. 5.



goods to the United Kingdom (UK) and allied countries during the course of the war, rather than just concentrating on meeting domestic requirements. It is interesting to note that as part of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign in the UK included a complimentary economic warfare measure which was a government developed and mandated calorie-based diet that ensured the British people would not starve. The general health of the British people also improved on the restricted calorie diet.

In the later years of the Second War World, Britain produced 80-90% of its vegetable requirements through the success of the 'Dig for Victory' campaign.

### **Chapter XVI, Section 5: Shipping**

The Commonwealth Department of Shipping and Transport took charge of the policy which included the following tasks immediately on the outbreak of war: The supervision and control of merchant ships, over 200 gross tons, on the Australian register including; co-ordination of the operation of shipping companies; requisitioning and chartering of ships including those required for the Navy, Army and Air Force; the management, operation and detailed administration of requisitioned and chartered merchant shipping (except were manned by Naval crews), including the oversight and control as necessary of the employment of seamen in ships; oversight and control as necessary, of the stevedoring industry and the provision of war risk insurance schemes for shipping and cargoes.<sup>7</sup>

The functions of the shipping policy in the War Book envisaged the complete control of that sector of the economy by the Commonwealth Department of Shipping and Transport which included the oversight of the docks and the respective unions which operated there also.

### **Chapter XVI, Section 9: Financial and Economic Policy**

The Commonwealth Treasury was to be responsible for the development of wartime financial and economic policy in collaboration with the Commonwealth Bank and other Commonwealth departments.

Under this chapter, Treasury was to introduce a scheme of insurance to cover the war risks for ships on the Australian register and their cargoes. The scheme was to be in place at the commencement of the war. Treasury was also to introduce a scheme for the compensation of merchant seaman in respect of personal injury and loss of effects in war. This scheme was to be in place as soon as possible after the outbreak of war.<sup>8</sup> So, the offset of risks to ships and their cargoes was a more

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<sup>7</sup> 'War Book of the Commonwealth of Australia', Chapter XVI, pp. 7-8.

immediate priority than the seamen who crewed the ships.

### Chapter XVI: Miscellaneous Matters: Universities

Under this section of the War Book the Commonwealth Office of Education was responsible for Australian universities to ensure that they are able to meet essential defence needs in university training and research and to meet university training problems of re-establishment.

### Conclusion

The analysis of some of the elements of the War Book confirms the document as one of the fundamental blueprints of how Australia entered the war. It was complemented by similar war books in each state of the Commonwealth. Further analysis of each state war book is a military history research journey which awaits to get a holistic picture of Australia’s road into the Second World War.

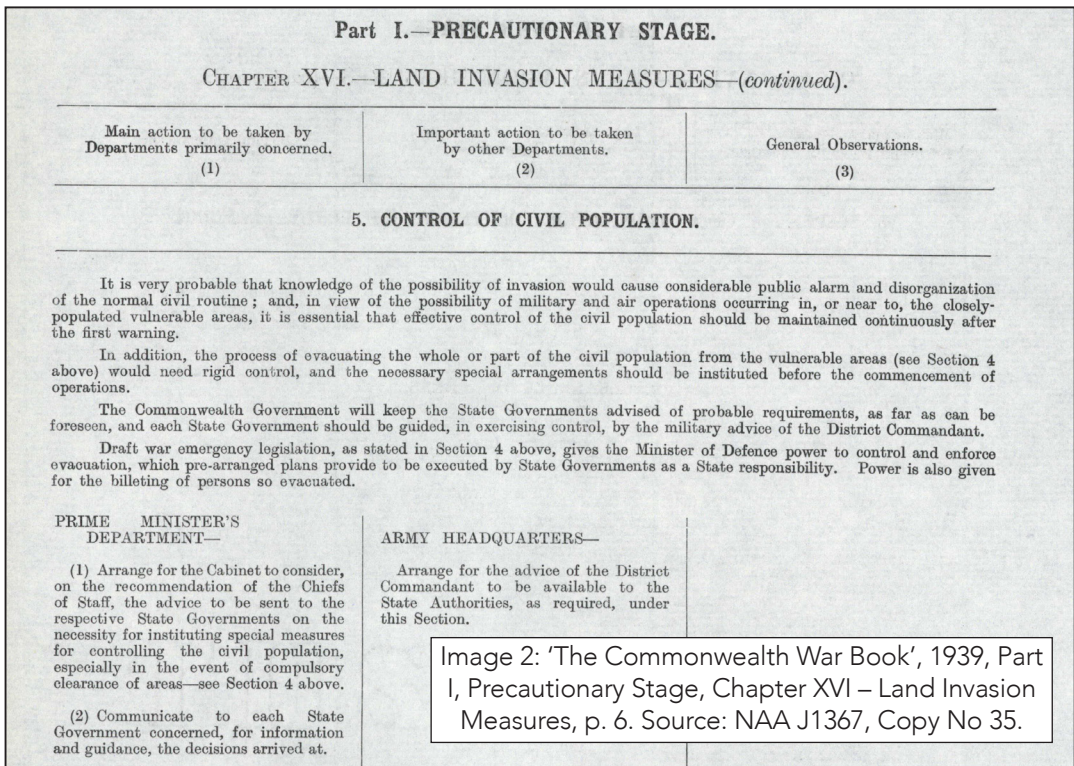


Image 2: 'The Commonwealth War Book', 1939, Part I, Precautionary Stage, Chapter XVI – Land Invasion Measures, p. 6. Source: NAA J1367, Copy No 35.



## 'Well done that man' Sir Stanley Savage and Dick Smibert

Graham McKenzie-Smith<sup>1</sup>

Recently going through my collection of military biographies I opened up my copy of W.B. Russell's biography of Sir Stanley Savage.<sup>2</sup> He enlisted as a private in 1915, was commissioned at Gallipoli and served both in France and with Dunsterforce in Persia, finishing the war as a captain. Savage returned to civilian life and was a leading figure in the formation of Legacy. After progressing through the militia to command the CMF 10th Brigade he was selected to raise the Victorian 17th Infantry Brigade for the AIF 6th Division in 1939. He led them through the Western Desert, Greek and Syrian campaigns before returning to Australia in early 1942 to lead the 3rd Division. He commanded them in the advance on Salamaua before being promoted to lieutenant general to command the II Australian Corps in the Bougainville Campaign. The title of the biography is *There Goes a Man* which sums up the respect that his men felt for their 'boss'. However, this story is also about one of the men under his command.

Richard Stanley Smibert was born in September 1913 and at 18 years old joined the Melbourne University Rifles while studying medicine. He re-engaged for three years as a sergeant in January 1935 and was commissioned in 1937,<sup>3</sup> joining the 5th Infantry Battalion (Victorian Scottish Regiment) as their regimental medical officer (RMO). He was a registrar at the Alfred Hospital when he enlisted in the AIF as a captain in November 1939 with the low regimental number VX241 and was allocated to the 6th Division medical corps. Nominally posted to the 2/2nd Field Ambulance which worked with the 17th Brigade he was appointed as RMO for the 2/5th Battalion, maintaining his connection with the militia unit that provided many soldiers to that new unit. The unit history records that 'his efficiency, keen perception and kindly manner made him popular with all ranks, and

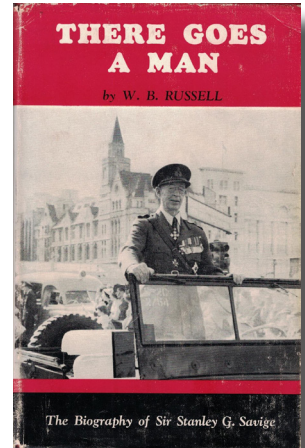


Image 1: Cover of *There Goes a Man: The Biography of Sir Stanley G. Savage*.



Image 2: Dick Smibert on enlistment in 1939. Source: NAA B883, SMIBERT RICHARD STANLEY.

1 Graham is a MHSA member in WA and a regular contributor to *Sabretache*.

2 W.B. Russell, *There Goes a Man, The Biography of Sir Stanley G Savage*, Longmans, Melbourne, 1959.

3 Service records, NAA B1535, 736/22/195.

he was soon universally known as “Dickie”.<sup>4</sup> The unit arrived in the Middle East in May 1940 and in December the brigade was heavily engaged in the Western Desert campaign. Smibert attended to the wounded in the 2/5th Battalion and for a period was the senior medical officer (SMO) for the brigade. The brigade was just being relieved by the 9th Division in the first week of March 1941 when Smibert was promoted to major and reallocated to join 2/2nd Field Ambulance while the brigade withdrew to Egypt prior to transfer to Greece. Savage, as brigade commander, sent him a note which says a lot about Smibert’s good work and the style of Savage. Smibert sent the note back to his mother for safe keeping and it later found its way into the Savage biography.

The 2/2nd Field Ambulance remained with the 17th Brigade through the Greek campaign and were evacuated to Crete from where many were evacuated from the south coast beaches. After a short period in Syria, they accompanied the brigade to Ceylon before returning to Australia in August 1942. Smibert was promoted to lieutenant colonel in September in command of the 2/2nd Field Ambulance. They moved with the brigade to Milne Bay in October and to Port Moresby in January 1943. Since May 1942 light forces based at Wau had been watching the Japanese at Lae and Salamaua and in January the Japanese moved towards the base at Wau causing the 17th Brigade to be sent by air to become Kanga Force. On 14 February Smibert was sent forward as SMO for Kanga Force where he organised the medical arrangements over the wide area of operations. Savage arrived in April with the headquarters of the 3rd Division in overall control of the campaign and Smibert continued as SMO for brigade which controlled the forward operations in the Mubo and Mt Tambu area. As the fighting

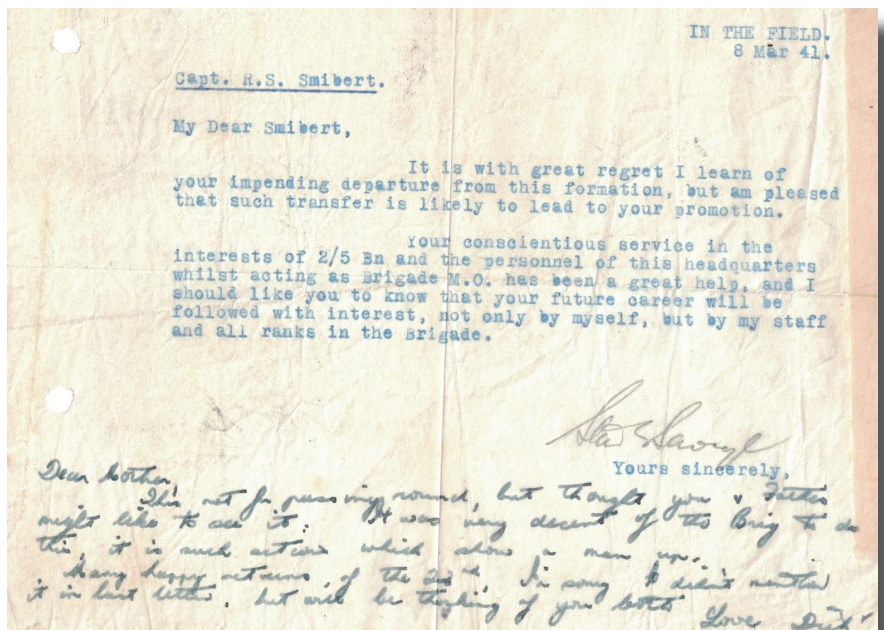


Image 3: Note from Savage to Smibert, 8 March 1941. Source: Author.

4 F.W. Speed (ed.), *Espirit de Corps, The History of the Victorian Scottish Regiment and the 5th Infantry Battalion*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1988, p. 163.

approached Salamaua 5th Division arrived to take over on 25 August 1943. The 17th Brigade left the line at that stage and returned to Australia in October.

Smibert prepared his report on the medical services carried out by the 2/2nd Field Ambulance which is at the Australian War Memorial.<sup>5</sup> On 24 August the divisional headquarters prepared their recommendation that Smibert should be awarded an OBE,<sup>6</sup> which was recommended by Colonel Green (ADMS 3 Inf Div), Maj Gen Savige (GOC 3 Inf Div), Lt Gen Herring (GOC 1 Aust Corps) and Lt Gen Mackay (GOC-in-C NG Force) before being approved by General Blamey (C-in-C AMF) on 15 November. The award of the OBE was announced on 26 May 1944.

Savige prepared and submitted his 'Report on Operations of 3 Aust. Div in Salamaua Area from 23 April 43. to 25 Aug. 43'. On 3 March 1944 Savige sent a copy to Smibert which he endorsed with a personal message of thanks for his work during the campaign. The cover of this copy of the report with Savige's message also found its way into the Savige biography.

Smibert left New Guinea with the 2/2nd Field Ambulance in October 1943 and assembled with the 17th Brigade at Wondecla, Queensland training while the 6th Division waited for a new role. This came in December 1944 when they were

tasked to relieve the XIth U.S. Corps at Aitape, New Guinea. Rather than hold a static perimeter the 6th Division was to advance down the coast to capture Wewak with the 17th Brigade to rotate advancing on the inland flank of the coastal advance. The 2/2nd Field Ambulance

Date Recommendation passed forward.

		Received	Passed	Army Form W. 3121. (August)
		Brigade	Division	
Brigade 3 AUST		24 Aug 43	24 Aug 43	
Division		24 Sep 43	27 Sep 43	
Corps		2 Oct 43	26 Oct 43	
Army		29 Oct 43	2 Oct 44	

S.No. (Serial)	Unit	Personal or Army No.	Rank and Name. (Christian names must be stated)	Action for which commended (Date and place of action must be stated)	Recommended by	Honour or Reward	(To be left blank)
	2/2 Aust Fd. Amb.	VX 241	Major (2/Lt-Col) SMIBERT, Richard Stanley	For highly meritorious service and devotion to duty during the operations in the WAU SALAMAU Area. As SMO KANGA FORCE from 14 Feb 1943, he organized and administered the medical arrangements in the early phase of the whole area of the WAU BULOLO VALLEY and the MUBO and MISSIM areas. With tireless energy he moved everywhere throughout this large and most mountainous area, supervising the work of the many medical posts. As SMO 17 Aust Inf Bde from 18 Apr 43, he was responsible for the medical arrangements for the operations in the MUBO-MT TAMBU Area. He organized the medical arrangements and selected the sites of the posts at BULGAF DERLES and GOODVIEW and so disposed his surgeons and personnel that every demand on the medical service was fully met. His cheerfulness and enthusiasm set a magnificent example to his men during a long and most arduous campaign.	Recommended by: Lt-Gen. IVEN G. MACKAY, GOC-in-C, N.G. Force 11/10/43	O. B. E. Periodical	
<p>Next of Kin - Mr. G.H. Smibert (Father) 50 Hopetown Rd., TORAK, Vic.</p> <p>Date of Birth - 17. 9.13</p> <p>Date of Enl. - RIF 25 Oct 39</p> <p>1st Commission - 18.10.39</p> <p>Recommended (Sgd) E.F. HERRING, Lt-Gen. GOC. 1 Aust Corps 27 Sep 43</p> <p>Recommended (Sgd) IVEN G. MACKAY, Lt-Gen. GOC-in-C, N.G. Force 11/10/43</p> <p>Recommended by: Lt-Gen. IVEN G. MACKAY, GOC-in-C, N.G. Force 11/10/43</p> <p>Recommended most Strongly (Sgd) STAN G. SAVIGE, Maj-Gen. Comd. 3 Aust Division.</p> <p>RECOMMENDED FOR PERIODICAL AWARD OF C.P.E. (C.P.E.) General 15 NOV 1943. AUSTRALIAN MILITARY FORCES</p>							

Image 4: Smibert's nomination for OBE. Source: War service records, NAA B883, SMIBERT RICHARD STANLEY.

established dressing stations and aid posts along the casualty evacuation route for this inland advance and their MDS was at Cape Wom when the war ended. With his long service overseas Smibert had a high discharge priority, so he relinquished command of the ambulance on 26 October 1945 and was discharged in November. For his work during the Aitape/Wewak campaign he was Mentioned in Despatches.



After the war he returned to the Alfred Hospital and was medical superintendent until early 1953. During this time, he re-joined the CMF and was promoted to colonel. He moved into general practice at St Kilda until 1970 and was a founding member of the Royal Australian College of General Practice (Victorian Faculty) in 1955. Until his retirement in 1987 he worked with the Department of Health as a medical counsellor, assisting GPs with their interaction with the department.<sup>7</sup>

When Bill Russell published the Savage biography in 1959 he sent a signed copy to Smibert. The biography contains many references to Savage’s leadership and man management skills which he exercised at war and peace. He touched many men and brought out the best in his team, exemplified by these interactions with Smibert, who himself exhibited similar leadership skills.

When and how this biography found its way into the Grimwade Collection has been long forgotten, but Dick Smibert’s family has been located in Adelaide and with its attachments the book is to be presented back to his family for safekeeping.

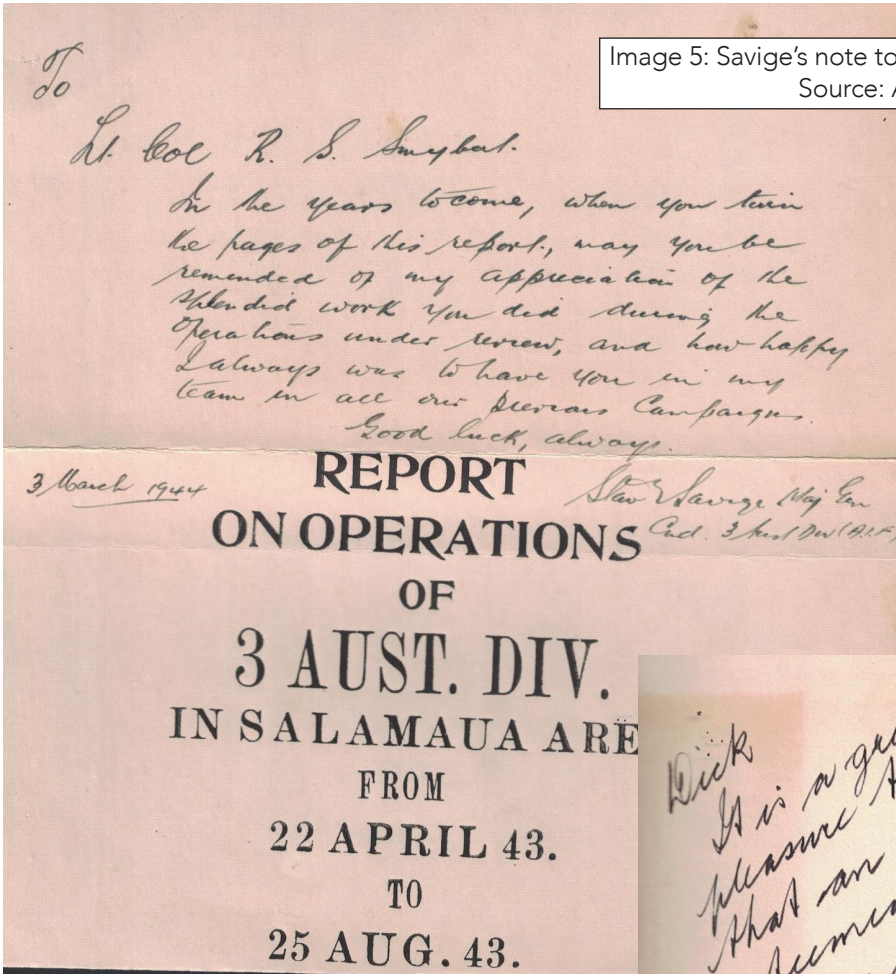


Image 5: Savage’s note to Smibert 3 March 1944. Source: Author.

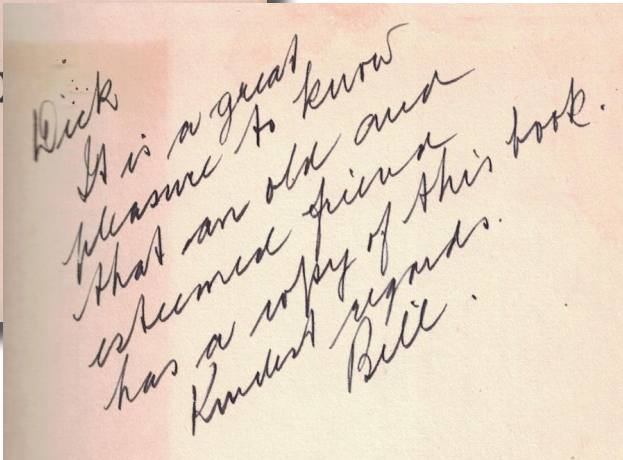
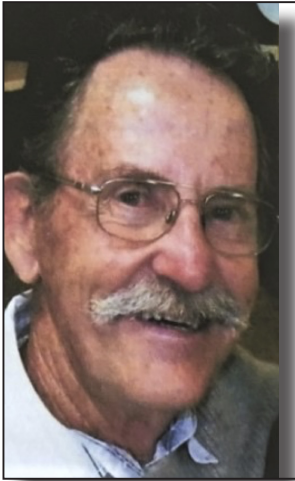


Image 6: Inscription in Savage biography to Smibert by Bill Russell. Source: Author.



## Obituary: John Meyers, FMHSA

Nicknames in the Army are often given as a compliment to the person so named, although sometimes, a nickname will sound derogatory. The nickname for John is a perfect example – ‘Mongrel Meyers’.

What is a mongrel? John could have answered that question.

Once you’ve had a mutt in your life, it’s hard to face the future without the unswerving loyalty that dogs give. John loved them. People who knew John loved him and stood loyally with him. John was ever a willing workhorse.

John knew people. So many who talk about John will say, “He knew how to get through to me. He knew how to get the best out of me”.

As a warrant officer, John knew that war is serious. He knew the way to get the best out of recruits – it was to bring out the mongrel. In any other facet of John’s life, the strange nickname will not find a home.

John would not seek to be remembered with fine words. As John’s time to leave the field approached, his friend Steve asked, “Would you like to speak at your own funeral?” “Bloody oath, I would!” So – Steve filmed a video. What did John say? He said, “Thank you” to all, and he asked everyone to “take care of Else”.

John and Else were married in 1963. The tragic loss of their two children in a motor vehicle accident near Gympie in 1982 led to the establishment, in 2004, of the museum in memory of Geoffrey and Karen, as a non-profit heritage endowment, created and sustained by the late John Wallace Meyers, and his wife Else, for the benefit of the Fraser Coast community.

John inspired many to volunteer and work with him at the museum, to make history live for visitors, especially school children.

Many opinions of John were voiced and/or written after his passing. They are summed up with the words of one correspondent:

To me, John displayed a healthy self-respect, but there was no inflated ego. John had wide knowledge. He listened humbly and eagerly to people’s thoughts and questions about military matters. John saw the big picture in MHSA and was always willing to help with requests.

John Meyers lives now in the memory of all who knew him and valued his friendship and generous sense of purpose.

We are honoured to be counted in that company.

Diane Melloy and Russell Paten



## Living With Cancer for Thirty Years

John Meyers

Thirty years is on the horizon, and I have been encouraged to tell the story of how I have lived and worked with cancer. It all started in 1990, when my wife Else and I decided to take our first holiday in New Zealand. This was about two years after we started a hardwood sawmill at Tiaro, in partnership with long-term friend Garry Dale and his wife Jill. The friendship began in 1948 when Garry and I started together at Tiaro State School.

For several years, I had suffered with digestive problems. On holiday for a couple of weeks, it was worse than usual, probably due to the different lifestyle and the food we were eating. I remember saying to Else, "When we arrive home, I will go to the Doctor and keep going, until he has diagnosed the problem".

At the third visit, he sent me for an ultrasound of stomach and abdomen. A couple of days later, I was told that, in his opinion, I had cancer and should see an abdominal surgical specialist in Brisbane. I still remember vividly the shock of receiving this news. My mother died of bowel cancer at sixty. I was then only forty-eight. When I left the doctor's surgery, my brain was spinning so much that I could not remember where my vehicle was parked.

Things happened very quickly after that. Within three days I visited the specialist at Holy Spirit Hospital in Brisbane. A cat scan confirmed that I had cancer. He recommended surgery to remove the growth. Three days later, the surgery was carried out, and I will never forget coming out of the anaesthetic and asking Else if she knew the results of the surgery. Well, she burst into tears and said that she would leave it up to the doctor to tell me. That sure got my brain spinning again.

The doctor advised me that I had Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma. He had decided against trying to remove the cancer surgically. It was all through the arteries and he would have had to remove the bowel. He referred me to a haematology and oncology specialist who visited the same day and recommended that I undertake at least six rounds of chemotherapy, with one round every three weeks. I asked him the prognosis and he said I probably had a 60-40% chance of living two years. This did not impress me, so I asked for a second opinion - 50-50% chance of living two years.

Because the first specialist was a bit more optimistic, I decided to stick with him. I was determined to improve the long-term prospect from 60-40% by adopting a positive attitude. I reckoned on taking it up to 70-30%

The first round of chemotherapy was carried out at Holy Spirit and a couple of days later I was discharged. For the next four or five months, every three weeks, Else and I would drive to Brisbane on Friday mornings. I had the infusion which took several hours. Then Else would drive us home. There was no way I would have

been fit to drive. About 6:00pm on Friday nights, I would start vomiting and still be dry retching at 2:00am before going into a deep sleep until about 9:00am. We would then have breakfast before I went back to work at the sawmill. The work would not be strenuous – usually just hopping on a loader with a bucket attached and cleaning up the mill yard.

For the next three weeks, work most days and staying active kept my mind off my health problems. I remember one of the young fellows working at the mill came to me one day asking if I would visit his mother who lived at Tinana. She was suffering from cancer. He said that she would sit in the lounge chair all day crying, would not leave the house, nor cook meals, nor do any housework. I went to visit the lady and we had a good yarn. Owing to my positive attitude, her son told me a couple of weeks later that his mother was back to her old self. The lady has since passed on, but at least she had a longer period of quality life. The same situation occurred with a workmate I knew from my days with the Main Roads Department in Toowoomba in the early 1970s.

For a quarter century, from 1968 to 1993, I was a soldier in the Army Reserve. Typical of the bent sense of humour of soldiers, it was suggested that a wake be held for me and about thirty fellows turned up for a dinner at a hotel in Gympie in late 1990. They reckoned it was better to have a wake while we were still able to attend.

Another memory that lives with me is visiting the specialist after the cat scan in early 1991, to find out if the treatment had been a success or not. Else and I sat in his office holding hands. We could hear him in the next room shuffling through the X-rays. He came through the doorway and casually said, “It’s gone”. Else and I just about collapsed!

There was oral tablet treatment for the next few months, followed by a visit to the specialist every six months for check-ups until 2003 when the cancer reappeared, but nowhere as serious as back in 1990. This resulted in having to receive infusions of a form of chemotherapy every week for four weeks. For the past 15 years I had been the CEO of Dale and Meyers and during this time the company had grown quite significantly.

Else and I decided it was time to call it quits. We bought a caravan and travelled around Australia for the next six months.

Back in Maryborough, early 2004, visiting the specialist, I was greeted with the news that the cancer was back again and needed another four rounds of the same treatment as in 2003. Just after this, we bought the JE Brown building in Wharf Street and started the Maryborough Military & Colonial Museum.

In 2006, another four rounds of treatment and specialist’s recommendation that I go on a maintenance treatment of one round every six months. For several years, these were carried out at the Mater Hospital in Brisbane. About 2012, I

started having them at St Stephen's Hospital in Maryborough and after it closed, St Stephen's in Hervey Bay.

For the next ten years, the maintenance treatments were a success. In December 2015, the cancer came back with a vengeance. Back to Wesley Hospital in Brisbane for another six rounds of chemotherapy in the first half of 2016. Now I was under the care of a younger specialist, after about 25 years under the older specialist, who was about my own age. During one of the specialist's visits in the hospital, I asked the size of the tumour. "About two kilograms". He showed it to me on the computer screen - the black mass just about filling the abdomen cavity was pushing up against the organs in that area. Prior to starting chemotherapy, I needed an operation to remove three kidney stones in the bladder.

Once again, treatments every three weeks. This time, the specialist insisted that because of my age, I had to stay in hospital for twelve days. I would be at home for nine days before returning to hospital for the next round. Fortunately, improved medications meant there was no sickness, and the doctor gave me a compliment that I was a model patient.

Unfortunately, I stayed in remission for only 18 months before having to go on another form of chemotherapy for several months. This resulted in the tumour shrinking again and the specialist then decided to start me on a new drug that works very well with my type of cancer. It is called Ibrutinib and is available under the PBS and costs the Government nearly \$9,000 per month. Fortunately, it costs me only \$6.50 per month.

I have now been on this treatment since October 2018. At the moment [April 2020], I am still in remission. As mentioned earlier, we started the military museum in 2004. With the assistance of 100+ volunteers, it has now grown to be recognised as the best military museum in Australia, outside of Canberra. There is no doubt that the continued involvement with the day-to-day running of the museum, and the support of a devoted and loving wife has resulted in my still being reasonably active at 78 years of age and having survived cancer for nearly 30 years.

My wish is that other cancer sufferers can be inspired by this story to adopt a more positive mental and physical attitude, that will allow them to achieve a better quality of life.

## Reviews

### *Forgotten War*

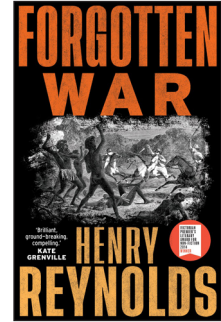
Henry Reynolds

NewSouth Books, Sydney, 2022

Paperback, \$24.99

As one of Australia's best-known historians, Henry Reynolds, has made significant contributions to the field and facilitated a wider understanding of our past. *Forgotten War*, first published ten years ago, proved to be a seminal work on the subject of colonial frontier violence in Australia. His scholarship is sound, the writing is engaging and his subject important. Reading *Forgotten War* a decade after it was first published has been a valuable experience. Significant changes have happened in the intervening years, both positive and negative, but the central argument of Reynolds remains as important today as it did before.

This new edition of *Forgotten War* still asks questions that are as relevant today as they were ten years ago.



**Justin Chadwick**

### *Danger on our Doorstep: Could Australia Go to War With China?*

Jim Molan

Harper Collins, Sydney, 2022

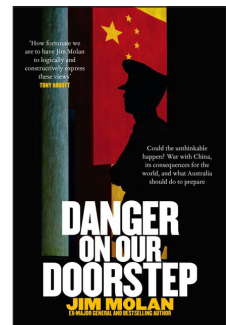
Paperback, \$34.99

As the world's attention for most of 2022 is drawn to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, somewhat less attention has been paid to the China question, where its leadership's ambitions, specifically President for Life Xi Jinping at the head of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), are becoming increasingly evident.

Jim Molan grabs the reader squarely by the shoulders, swivelling him/her around to re-focus on the primary threat – in the Pacific. This book is confronting, like the threat it unveils. Confronting in its directness, honesty and evidence base as the hypothesis unfolds. Like the author, many of us are schooled in strategy and been around for a long time. Long enough to realise that Molan might well be right on the money. After all, most of the time, he usually is.

When reading this book, try reading the Prologue first, immediately followed by the Epilogue. When the scenario set there and the consequences are digested, read the remainder in the order of chapters presented. It will jolt you.

Back in 1982 we read General Sir John Hackett's seminal work *The Third World War: the Untold Story*. We saw the (then) most likely threat to the international



order unfold. World War III did not become a reality then, but *Danger on our Doorstep* is eerily reminiscent of Hackett's work. Another general, forty years later following seismic shifts in national power that have occurred across the world, another real possibility of a major conflict with global repercussions. Many are now saying this is now a near certainty with China's posturing.

Molan's book predicts a pre-emptive strike by China on United States Pacific military assets, but extending into all aspects of warfare, not just kinetic. The chapters address how this situation came to be, how China might carry out such a strike, and why. They address the how and when, and what might occur when such a strike occurs, likely to happen he says, sooner rather than later. The United States' capacity to handle such a blow, and Australia's lack of preparedness and what it needs to do to be ready are also addressed. While it is possible that such an event might be avoided, all the indicators are that this is the way the world is headed, Ukraine conflict or not. We are indeed in dangerous times; another Pearl Harbour, according to the author, is coming.

Hard to believe? On 16 October 2022 at the Chinese Communist Party's 20th Congress during which he was confirmed as China's leader, President Xi Jinping stated in a 102-minute speech that he would '... never give up the option to use force, and we reserve the right to take all necessary measures'.

You read about how it might go in this book. Hackett turned out to be wrong. You be the judge as to whether Molan is. Be ready.

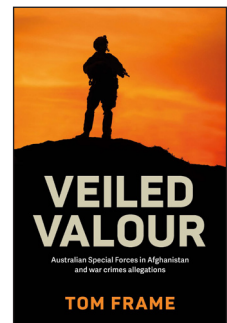
## Russell Linwood

*Veiled Valour: Australian Special Forces in Afghanistan and war crimes allegations*

Tom Frame

UNSW Press, Sydney, 2022

Paperback, \$49.99



The accusations of war crimes perpetrated by Australian special forces soldiers in Afghanistan has caused significant concern in the Australian public and defence hierarchies. How could these highly trained and specialised soldiers resort to the levels of uncontrolled violence they have been charged with? And why did the actions continue for so long? Tom Frame in *Veiled Valour*:

*Australian Special Forces in Afghanistan and war crimes allegations* tackles these questions and more. Rather than just investigate the alleged war crimes, the soldiers that committed them and the system that allowed them, Frame delves much further back into the history of Afghanistan and the development of Australian special forces. This background provides a firm foundation on which to understand the environment in which the Australians operated. By doing so he has produced a book that is as comprehensive as you will get at this time in history.



Concluding just prior to the release of the Brereton report, *Veiled Valour*, is essential reading for those who seek a full understanding of the events, the soldiers and the organisations that contributed to a dark period in Australian military history.

**Justin Chadwick**

*The Digger of Kokoda*

Daniel Lane

Pan Macmillan, Sydney, 2022

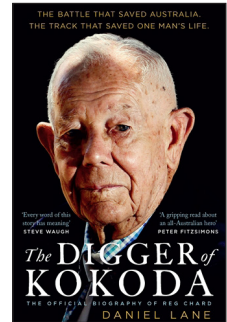
Paperback, \$29.99

Daniel Lane is to be congratulated on an excellent publication.

Very few books on the Kokoda campaign have impressed me with its depth in the telling of the bravery of the men who served. This official biography of Reg Chard is no exception as to the bravery of those who served in World War Two. *The Digger of Kokoda* goes into the life and times of a young Australian before enlistment, his service in the Kokoda campaign and his life after the war. I consider this man to be a humble hero and is an inspiration to those who come after him. This book had a profound effect on me, and I would urge anyone even those remotely interested in what Australian soldiers did New Guinea and the terrible experiences they had to endure, for some years after the war.

This book is well written, easy to read and an honest portrayal of a young man who volunteered for service with the Australian Army. He was to experience the savage fighting against equally determined enemy soldiers who could be immensely cruel of which Reg was to witness on several occasions. Those images would remain with him for all his life. I found the story heartbreaking, moving and inspiring. This is a story that should be told through the ages as to what these men did and the price they paid. His life after the war is equally compelling and a story on its own. He married, raised a family and devoted his life to various interest groups telling the story of Kokoda through his eyes. He was awarded an OAM for his involvement in the Kokoda Track Memorial Walk, telling the story of the brave men and women who served in the campaign. Lane has written a riveting story of courage, devotion to duty and mateship and what these values really mean. This is a story that had to be told and the author has done just that.

I would recommend this book in the strongest terms to the younger generation so they can understand what their grandparents, fathers and uncles did achieve in Australia's time of great peril. All in all a great read.



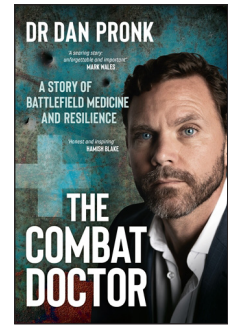
**Mike English**

*The Combat Doctor: A story of battlefield medicine and resilience*

Dr Dan Pronk

Pan McMillan, Sydney, 2022

Paperback, \$36.99



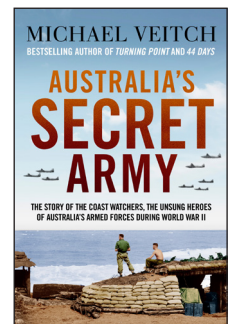
This story will appeal to those who like to read how some individuals relish whatever they do, and enjoy the accompanying adrenalin rush. Dr Dan Pronk details how, as the son of an Australian Army helicopter pilot and the younger brother of a soldier who eventually becomes an officer in the SAS, he decides to study medicine on an Army scholarship after the disappointment of not making a career as a professional triathlete. A significant part of the book is devoted to him describing the enduring agony of his SAS selection process. The story then centres on the author and his four tours of duty and over 100 combat missions with Australian special forces in Afghanistan. Plenty of action and descriptions about gunfights and the bringing of impressive amounts of firepower against local enemy forces. The use of night vision glasses when one side has this technology and the other side does not would have gave coalition forces a significant advantage. How as an Army doctor the author participated in missions not only as the first responder medical authority should colleagues be wounded, but also as an active rifleman when not administering to the injured, using his weapon to attempt to eliminate enemy combatants. And, once the combat is finished and the need to make a life after the Army presents, how the author returns to civilian life and to his young wife and children.

**Dick Kagi***Australia's Secret Army: The Story of the Coast Watchers, The Unsung Heroes of Australia's Armed Forces During World War II*

Michael Veitch

Hachette Australia, Sydney 2022

Paperback, \$32.99



Over the years I have read several of Michael Veitch's books and I have always found his books to be interesting and highly informative. This book is up to the standard of his previous books even more so. This book is the compelling story of a group of mainly civilian men and women who at the risk of their lives set up observation posts to observe Japanese movements along the coast lines and jungles in the South Pacific reporting there findings to the appropriate authorities. The author has obviously spent a considerably amount of time researching these events, interviewing veterans of the coast watchers service. It gives the book a realistic insight into the coast watchers activities.

The author also includes the loyal natives and what they contributed to the reporting of the Japanese movements and at times risking their own lives. Several natives did lose their lives in carrying out these tasks. That being said several coast watchers also lost their lives after being captured by the Japanese troops. With skill and determination these men and women continued to elude the Japanese sometimes with the Japanese soldiers only a short distant away trying to hunt them down. If this book was not a true story, as it reads almost like a boys own tale with all the action and experiences of the coast watchers. The pacific war may have turned out differently if not for the work of these brave men and women.

Michael Veitch has woven a readable story of brave man and women of the coast watcher service. If you never read another book on the Pacific War read this book as the author details the story of brave and should I say heroic civilians who suffered from exhaustion, tropical disease and the ever present possibility of death, carried out their tasks efficiently.

The final chapter in this tale, titled 'A Legacy Forgotten', is a sad note indicating that very few of the Australian coast watchers were awarded Australian gallantry awards but several were awarded American medals. All in all this book is highly readable, informative and a great story. I recommend this book to anyone who wants a story of what people can do when called upon by their country to do their duty. The author Michael Veitch writes with an engaging style making a serious topic very easy to follow. All in all a great read.

## Michael English

### *The Cowra Breakout*

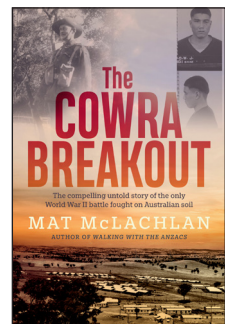
Mat McLachlan

Hachette, Sydney, 2022

Paperback, \$22.00

I had heard of the Cowra Breakout but knew very little of the events surrounding the breakout. As the author Mat McLachlan explains five Australians and 230 Japanese POWs died in the breakout. Australia authorities went to great pains to keep the event quiet so as not to upset Japan while so many Australians were held in their internment camps and could carry out reprisals.

The author has gone to great detail to provide a readable look at an event into Australian military history. The first few chapters go into the Japanese side of their attacks in the Pacific war including attacks on Australian soil. He has selected several Japanese individuals and explained their role in the war and their subsequent capture and imprisonment in the Cowra internment camp. The Japanese had a strict code of military discipline and this led to the Japanese feeling that as captured soldiers they would not be able to return to Japan as they had brought shame to themselves and their country. With this mind set the breakout



was a foregone conclusion, it would happen. The Australian authorities were mindful of the Japanese culture and made every effort to accommodate those prisoners.

The next chapters take the reader into the events leading up to the breakout and what followed afterwards. This book is engaging reading as the author has produced a credible insight to the Cowra breakout. The actual breakout chapters detail what occurred at the point of the breakout and the heroism of the Australian soldiers in trying to stem the assault by the Japanese on the barbed wire fences. Sadly, several Australian soldiers lost their lives defending the perimeter wire. The author describes this action in great detail which is a credit to his writing. The last few chapters show how the government of the day attempted to keep the details out of the local papers and adopt a low key attitude towards releasing the information to the public. It took several years before gallantry awards were issued to two of the brave Australians who lost their lives. The authorities did bury those lost on the assault with dignity and now the graves are neat and tidy and visited by many each year, testament to the continued good relations we now have with Japan. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in Australian military history. This book is well written, easy to read and looks into perhaps a little known part of Australian history. All In all, a great read.

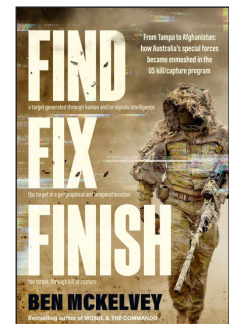
### Michael English

*Find Fix Finish: From Tampa to Afghanistan: How Australia's special forces became enmeshed in the US kill/capture program*

Ben McKelvey

Harper Collins, Sydney, 2022

Paperback, \$34.99 (also available as an e-book)



Compelling. Confronting. Easy to read. I found Find Fix Finish difficult to put down once I had started. Ben McKelvey is a freelance writer and editor who worked independently in Afghanistan, Syria and Iran, and was embedded with the ADF in East Timor and Iraq. His story spans the period from the SAS raid on the MV Tampa off the coast of Christmas Island in late 2001 (just before 9/11) to the high profile 2022 defamation trial involving serving and former members of the SAS. Interviews were conducted with many former (and one present) politicians, from both sides of the political divide, and are referred to extensively, as are interviews with serving and former ADF personnel.

Alexander Downer, a former Howard government minister, is quoted as saying, 'Don't send the SAS in if you're worried they're going to kill someone ... of course they're going to kill someone. They're trained to kill someone'. And Brendan Nelson, another former minister in the same government, said that 'The Americans wanted us to do the dirty work'. McKelvey claims that Afghanistan was

Australia's longest war, and also the most secretive. The human cost of that war is now emerging. It is stated that in 2021, it was believed that 464 currently serving and former soldiers had taken their own lives since the invasion of Afghanistan, but a later 2022 study by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that 1273 soldiers and former soldiers had died by self-harm since 2001. Further, that while the ADF does not release the numbers of enemy killed (nor of civilians killed accidentally), it is now believed that Australia's special forces war killed approximately 11,000 Afghans during the war in Afghanistan. Although the story is about more than the 2022 defamation trial, it includes many references to the trial transcript, as well as additional comment. In particular, given the conflicting evidence presented at the trial, McKelvey concludes that it is an unavoidable truth that a dangerous conspiracy of collusion and perjury emerged out of the SASR 'during and after the Afghan war ... and that allowing (this allegation) to fester untested within the SASR for more than a decade is not only a moral outrage, but a potential breach of national security'. He continues that at least one of the witnesses currently serving within 4 Squadron must be lying to the court, (to the war crimes investigators and presumably, (to) superiors within the regiment. 'This is an unacceptable threat to national security due to the potential for blackmail', McKelvey writes. A recommended read, notwithstanding that the author does not identify all of his sources.

**Dick Kagi**

*The Wizards of Oz: How Oliphant and Florey Helped win the war and Shape the Modern World*

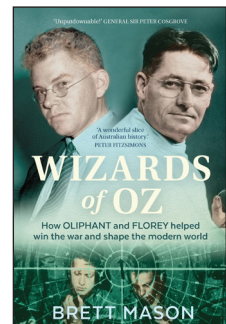
Brett Mason

NewSouth Books, Sydney, 2022

Paperback, \$34.99

While the history of wars is dominated by the actions on battlefields, other equally important aspects make for interesting reading. Without the work of scientists, technologists, engineers and business people, all the requirements of combat forces and the development of war-winning equipment would be left unfulfilled. The advances of penicillin and the atomic bomb are probably the best-known of the impact of scientists on the outcome of modern war. In the forefront of these developments were two Australian men – Mark Oliphant and Howard Florey. These two, coming from different backgrounds, but excelling in their specific fields are indicative of the value of science to war.

Brett Mason, in *The Wizards of Oz*, gives the reader an excellent narrative history of the achievements of these two outstanding scientists. From their early lives through to the development of the Australian National University, Mason tells the story of the science and value of Oliphant's and Florey's research.





His explanations of the science involved is clear, concise and suitable for a lay audience. He places the progress of each man in the context of local and international events while maintaining a clear narrative arc. By the conclusion we have experienced the trials and tribulations of Oliphant and Florey, the highs and lows, and have a clear understanding of just how important their contribution to the war effort and 20th century science.

In *The Wizards of Oz*, Mason has written a great narrative history that can be read and enjoyed by those without a science interest and would like to know of two great Australian scientists.

**Justin Chadwick**

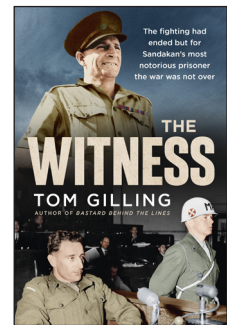
*The Witness*

Tom Gilling

Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, 2022

Paperback, \$34.99

The POW tragedy of the Second World War is deeply embedded in the Australian psyche and dramatically underscored throughout this story. Only six out of 1000 British and Australian POWs survived the forced march from Sandakan to Ranau in 1945. This remains one of the worst atrocities committed by the Japanese against Australians during that war. How did Bill Sticpewich, the main character of this book, survive it?



*The Witness* is an unusual book. Even on my second reading I found it somewhat challenging to knit the story of Sticpewich within the loss of all but six of the Death March. He was a Warrant Officer at the time and played a most unusual role both during incarceration and after the war ended at the war crimes trials. Why I did I find it a challenge?

Perhaps it is because of the author's approach in using 47 chapters, some only three pages long, like vignettes. Perhaps it is because much of the book does not directly address Sticpewich's role. Perhaps it is because the sub-title which states 'The fighting had ended but for Sandakan's most notorious prisoner [Sticpewich] the war was not over'; most of the book is a narrative of the POWs' suffering during the war. These structural issues are mainly why this reviewer found the book unusual.

The portions of the book dealing directly with Sticpewich paint him as a collaborator, a survivor who used his rank and civilian/military skills to avoid the privations and treatment that led to the death of almost all of the other POWs before, and then during, the fatal march. Paradoxically, that behaviour also equipped him with highly detailed knowledge of the Japanese and Formosan guards that he went on to use as a witness against them during the subsequent war trials.

Research sources cited in the extensive bibliography indicate a solid base for the story and its deductions. This includes the fact that Sticpewich played a major role, frequently the decisive one, in sending many of the enemy to their execution or long-term imprisonment for war crimes against. Sticpewich was awarded the MBE and commissioned after the war. He stayed in the Army after all of the survivors had demobilised. Interestingly, he met this death as a pedestrian through a two-car accident, an incident that has led to suggestions that it might have been ‘organised’, possibly by a disgruntled ex-POW. A serious hypothesis that receives little treatment.

The book ends in a non-conclusive manner, generally reflecting the unusual manner in which the story unfolds. I can agree with the back cover assertion that Sticpewich was Australia’s most notorious POW. What remains unclear is whether he really was a collaborator-survivalist or a warrant officer who ‘knew the system’ and used it to best advantage. Either way, this book describes the terrible experiences recorded by the few survivors, and that attribute alone makes the reading of this book well worthwhile.

**Russell Linwood**

*The Scrap Iron Flotilla: Five Valiant Destroyers and the Australian War in the Mediterranean*

Mike Carlton

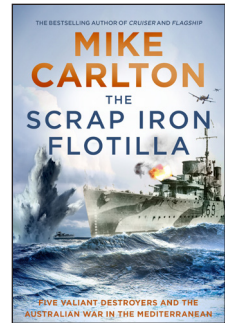
William Heinemann Australia, Sydney, 2022

Paperback, \$34.99

After decades as journalist, ABC correspondent and talk radio host, Mike Carlton has more recently embraced naval history. His books *Cruiser*, *First Victory* and *Flagship* have established Carlton as a leading author of popular history.

In *The Scrap Iron Flotilla* he has written on the Australian contribution to the naval war in the Mediterranean during the Second World War. Named by the German propagandist minister Josef Goebbels, the scrap iron flotilla was the term given to five Australian Navy destroyers that were despatched by the Australian government to support operations in North Africa.

Using a wide range of source material, including diaries and letters, Carlton retells the valiant efforts of the officers and sailors. His descriptions of life aboard the destroyers, actions, tragedy and triumph, are thoroughly engaging. This is popular history at its best.



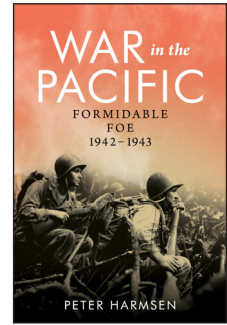
**Justin Chadwick**

*War in the Pacific: Volume 2 Formidable Foe 1942-1943*

Peter Harmsen

Big Sky Publishing, Newport, 2022

Paperback, \$32.99



An interesting, easy read. Recommended. Difficult to put down once reading had commenced. Part of a trilogy of books that focus on the six years of Pacific history from 1940 to 1945. Includes detailed endnotes plus a bibliography and index.

Peter Harmsen has been a foreign correspondent in east Asia for more than two decades, focusing mainly on Chinese speaking societies. *War in the Pacific* segments 1942 and 1943 into three month blocks and then gives an overview quarter by quarter of the Pacific war, detailing both naval conflicts and land battles, over different theatres. While those conflicts involving Australian forces will be well known to some (for example, Malaya, Singapore and New Guinea) other battles during that period, in particular, in China, Burma, in the American Pacific islands and conflicts involving India and Indian troops, might not be as well known. This book presents that wider perspective. It makes the interesting observation that while the Japanese Navy might have been at its zenith in early 1942, its lands forces were involved, particularly in Burma and in China, on a somewhat undermanned and underprepared basis. Included are comments that the Japanese emperor, Hirohito, may have been more actively involved than previously believed in following the Japanese successes, albeit from the point of view of continually encouraging a negotiated peace. The role of the American submarines in crippling the Japanese merchant marine is also examined. The submarines were able to go onto the offensive immediately hostilities commenced. Stories about MacArthur accepting a significant Filipino 'donation' as the Japanese advanced, Churchill stating that he hated Indians, and Chiang Kai-shek being described by the American General Stilwell as being arrogant and stubborn, are included. Of the 31 Commonwealth battalions available to defend Malaya and ultimately Singapore, 18 were Indian. The Japanese attack on Colombo in Ceylon in April 1942 is brought into context. How the Americans caused friction with the British in wishing to pursue a victory against the Japanese in the Pacific first before focussing on Europe. And how famine resulted in mass starvation that cost the lives of millions in China, Indochina and India in 1943. Lots of interesting information.

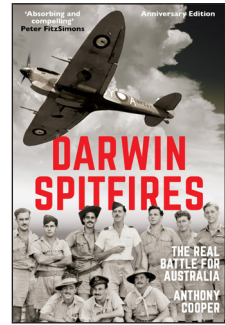
**Dick Kagi**

*Darwin Spitfires: The Real Battle for Australia*

Anthony Cooper

NewSouth Books, Sydney, 2022

Paperback, \$34.99



Originally published in 2011 and re-issued in an anniversary edition, *Darwin Spitfires: The Real Battle for Australia* details the Japanese air attacks on Darwin. From February 1942, Darwin became the epicentre of aerial assault on the Australian mainland and has been cemented in Australian military history. Here, Anthony Cooper has written an absorbing and fascinating history of the people, events, tragedy and outcomes of the almost two-year battle. Extensive in his use of primary sources, such as diaries, pilot logs and combat reports, *Darwin Spitfires* continues to be as great a read today as it did when first published. If you have not read this book then it is highly recommended that you do so.

**Justin Chadwick***How to Research and Honour Our Returned War Heroes*

Ian D Burrett

Sidharta Books, Glen Waverley, 2022

Paperback, \$39.95



Ian Burrett is the son of a World War One veteran whose aim for this book is to provide guidelines to communities 'desirous of updating their war memorials.' For Burrett a veteran's name inscribed on a physical memorial is the most important means to honour and remember them.

Burrett begins with a generalisation that 'Many of the people who returned home from active service, AND their families, suffered more than those who were killed.' Burrett adds: 'If you don't agree with this statement, stop reading!' If readers push on, they'll read of his Lone Pine pilgrimage. He discusses 'the scale of sacrifice and suffering incurred during WW1 compared to other conflicts.' Another chapter includes his analysis of the evolution of (physical) community memorials.

Burrett concludes 'that much more can be done to help keep The Spirit of Anzac alive.' This hollow rhetoric rings out throughout his book; it overruns his seemingly optimistic goal that the name of every veteran – killed in action or returned – is named on at least one physical memorial. Readers, this is a 2022 release, yet Burrett's premise is unwavering that focus should revolve around 'WW1 Anzacs, particularly those who served at *Gallipoli*'. (my italics).

Am I the only reader who wonders what traditions are exemplified in every veteran, and why Gallipoli is lifted to highest importance?

Burrett targets the absence of 'guidelines to assist communities on how to research and update their local memorials.' He weaves in his 'lengthy critique and

analysis' of the RSL movement which 'as a whole needs a major change in attitude as to its reason for existence.' The rise of ex-service organisations, including Soldier On, and Mates4Mates, is noted. He declares that if the RSL kept his beloved 'Spirit of Anzac' alive, there'd be no need for other organisations to arise – including Legacy. Yes, I am one reader who agrees the RSL must be relevant, but not addicted to a musty promulgation of ill-defined 'Spirit'.

To Burrett's logic, the 'Spirit' importance is validated by governmental endorsement of significant funds maintaining memorials, including AWM. In one chapter, 'Spirit of Anzac' is mentioned seventeen times: an Anzackery overdose. Burrett worries that a disconnectedness of community groups may detract from 'honouring your war heroes.' He implores readers to tell the groups to read the book. 'Divided we stand', he says. 'United we fall.'

The effort Burrett put into his book is evident. His intentions are propelled from strong conviction. He outlines both frustrations and successes as he worked towards his desired commemoration of war 'heroes'. He offers step-by-step guidelines and a range of websites that might benefit researchers. Burrett acknowledges that his advice isn't 100% accurate. He populates the text with his experiential detail, but unfortunately it is submerged by surrounding assumptions and generalisations.

He is steadfast that 'people do not, and will not, gather around a website on a screen' to commemorate what and whom they wish, because they'd rather gather around a physical community memorial. Some readers, I posit, may prefer personal reflection, including veterans who may avoid public services around a community memorial.

Burrett reiterates his 'campaign' goal that all who died and those who returned are commemorated 'by being named on at least one community war memorial.' His 2022 readers may query his thesis and find that his argument hits a blank. Readers might even prefer to electronically access, analyse, share and discuss commemorative information. But Burrett warns that if a reader does not join his campaign regarding adding names to community war memorials, they are 'forgetting them [veterans].' Burrett's broad swipe is, perhaps unwittingly, aimed at all readers. He is presumably dropping his own ball, forgetting that his readers may include veterans.

Some readers might not desire funds being poured into physical monuments and memorial walks; some readers might prefer funding towards ex-service organisations supporting veterans of more recent war service.

The book wraps up with Burrett's core chant about 'The Spirit of Anzac,' and his call to action: 'if you do not support my campaign, you have also decided not to support them [the veterans].' Readers might however reflect more deeply on the book's title and turn to their own choices how they wish to honour their veteran, hero or not, Anzac spirit burning or extinguished. As David Stephens observes in *The Honest History Book* (2017, p.128), 'Anzac should not turn soldiers into superheroes or saints, dying for grand causes.'



## MHSA BRANCH OFFICE BEARERS

### AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

President	Ian Stagoll 165 Belconnen Way Hawker ACT 2614 ian.stagoll@gmail.com 02 6254 0199	2.00pm, last Thursday of the month, Jan to Nov Canberra Southern Cross Club, Jamison
Secretary/Treasurer	James Smith canberrabomber@gmail.com 0414 946 909	

### QUEENSLAND

President	Neil Dearberg	2nd Saturday Jan, Mar
Vice President	Russell Paten	May, Jul, Sep and Nov
Secretary/Treasurer	Ian Curtis PO Box 243 Maleny QLD 4552	various locations South East Queensland

### SOUTH AUSTRALIA

President	Elizabeth Hobbs	7.30pm, 2nd Friday of each month, except Good Friday National Servicemen's Association 41 Surrey Road, Keswick
Secretary	Peter Staker Peter Staker, 68 Reynell Road, Woodcroft SA 5162 stakerp@gmail.com	
Treasurer	David Hobbs	

### VICTORIA

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Secretary	George Ward PO Box 854, Croydon Vic 3136 geofw46@outlook.com	
Treasurer	Bill Black	

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Secretary	Richard Farrar 2a Zamia St, Mt Claremont WA 6010 wasec@mhsa.org.au	
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