



# RECONNAISSANCE

Autumn 2012

*The Newsletter of the  
Military History Society of New South Wales Incorporated*  
ABN 51 558 007 698

**PRESIDENT: Mr Paul Waterhouse**

**SECRETARY: Ms Vashti Farrer**

**EDITOR: Mr Harry Taplin**

**PUBLISHER: Dr John Twyford**

**Postal Address: PO Box 490 PADDINGTON NSW 2021**

**Telephone: 02 9331 1202**

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## THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Society's forty third Annual General Meeting was held on 21 February 2012 and the President's Annual Report, along with the financial statements presented by the Treasurer, are printed below.

The election of Office Bearers and Councillors was conducted by Mr Joe Crumlin in the course of the meeting and the following were elected:

President: Paul Waterhouse

Vice-President: Ben Howell

Secretary: Vashti Farrer

Councillors: Joe Crumlin, Alan Kitchen, Harry Taplin, Paul Reynolds, John Twyford

A second Vice-President, Treasurer, and two Councillors are still to be elected and will be appointed at a later date.

## President's report on behalf of the Council

It is my great pleasure to report to the Annual General Meeting on our progress over the last twelve months.

The year 2011 saw the Council intensify its efforts to provide value to members and to make the Military History Society an attractive proposition for new participants.

Our monthly meetings have attracted interesting speakers covering such diverse topics as:

- the mining of the Messines Ridge in WWI;
- Australian commandos in East Timor in WWII;
- the Persian invasions leading to the Battle of Marathon;
- the evolution, successes, and failures of the Prussian/German General Staff;
- Julius Caesar's approach to Total War;
- the weaponry used by the NSW military up until Federation;
- the role of the war correspondent in developing historical narrative; and
- Billy Blue's military career.

Our flagship event – the Brigadier Howard Memorial Lecture – was given by Dr Jean Bou of the Australian War Memorial on the topic of 'Lancers to bushmen: Australian mounted troops and the Boer War, 1899-1902'.

These lectures were all well attended by our enthusiastic membership, with speakers often peppered with numerous questions about their presentations.

Our program for 2012 is just as diverse, with lectures on the evolution of the battleship, the Punic Wars, Napoleon's invasion of Russia, the advent of the warplane, the Korean War, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the arms and armour of the ancient Greeks, and Australia under attack in WWII already in the pipeline. In almost all cases these lectures have been tied to anniversaries falling in 2012.

This interest shown by members in our activities is encouraging, as it makes me reasonably confident that we will grow in the coming year. But we are not being complacent when it comes to membership. The Council has already identified several possible sources of new members, from RSLs to groups such as the History Teachers' Association. We are approaching such bodies to gauge the level of interest amongst their members and to offer incentives for taking up membership of the Society.

We are also, for the first time, reaching out to undergraduate university students through the inaugural public speaking competition. It is our hope that this competition will increase the recognition of our Society and encourage a younger generation of members to participate.

As in the last few years, this activity has taken place without undermining our budgetary position. Since 2007 the Society's bank accounts have more than trebled – from \$6,336 in that year to \$20,629 in 2011. This is an excellent outcome and it has given Council the flexibility to explore opportunities to grow and to increase services to members.

Three examples come to mind.

First, there is the excellent newsletter *Reconnaissance*, which has been prepared and circulated each quarter by our Patron, Brig. Phil Carey. Phil's stewardship of this has been exemplary, and the newsletter's timely distribution has allowed our members to keep abreast of all of our activities.

Secondly, Council has been investigating the feasibility of relaunching *Despatch*. At this stage it is not clear when this will proceed, but it is our intention to publish such a journal again in future.

Thirdly, we have now launched a website – [www.mhnsnw.info](http://www.mhnsnw.info) Although this is a relatively simple site at present, we eventually hope to be able to upload past copies of *Reconnaissance*, correspondence and submissions, even articles and speeches. But that is all to come.

For my part, it has been a great honour to be President over the last twelve months. I have been ably and enthusiastically assisted in this role by the Council, and I thank each of the councillors for their dedication and commitment to the Society and its goals.

In particular I'd like to thank our Patron, Brig. Phil Carey, for his counsel, support, and hard work behind the scenes – his depth of knowledge on matters historical and his desire to see the Society resurgent is inspirational.

Most importantly, of course, I thank the members, without whom the Society would not exist.

I look forward to 2012 being a great success for the Military History Society of New South Wales Inc.

## Statement of Assets and Liabilities as at 31 December 2011

| 2010                 |  | 2011        |
|----------------------|--|-------------|
|                      | <b>Members' Funds</b>                                |             |
| \$17,379.84          | Balance at 31 December                               | \$20,990.09 |
|                      | <i>which are represented by:</i>                     |             |
|                      | <b>Current Assets</b>                                |             |
| \$16,914.34          | Cash at Bank – ANZ *NOTE 1                           | \$20,629.49 |
| \$545.50             | Book Stocks – at Estimated Realisation Value *NOTE 2 | \$360.60    |
| \$17,459.84          | <b>Less Current Liabilities</b>                      | \$20,990.09 |
| \$80.00              | Subscriptions in Advance                             | –           |
| \$17,379.84          | <b>Excess of Assets over Liabilities</b>             | \$20,990.09 |
| <b>Total Members</b> | As at 31 December 2011                               | 79          |
| <b>NOTE 1</b>        | Current account                                      | \$3,191.27  |
|                      | V2 Interest Bearing Account                          | \$17,438.22 |
|                      |  | \$20,629.49 |
| <b>NOTE 2</b>        | Estimation of book values as follows:                |             |
|                      | 2011 Realisation Value                               | \$545.50    |
|                      | 2011 Total Value                                     | \$1,091.00  |
|                      | 2011 Sales   | \$450.10    |
|                      | 2011 Purchases                                       | \$80.30     |
|                      | 2012 Total Value                                     | \$721.20    |
|                      | 2012 Realisation Value (50% of total)                | \$360.60    |

**Paul Waterhouse**  
**President and Acting Treasurer**

## Statement of Receipts and Payments for the year ended 31 December 2011

| 2010        |            |  |            | 2011        |
|-------------|------------|--|------------|-------------|
| \$14,122.06 |            | Balance brought forward                  |            | \$17,824.10 |
|             |            | <b>ADD RECEIPTS</b>                      |            |             |
|             |            | <b>Subscriptions</b>                     |            |             |
|             |            | \$2,900.00 Current                       | \$2,640.00 |             |
|             |            | \$80.00 Advance                          | -          |             |
|             | \$2,980.00 | - Joining Fees                           | -          | \$2,640.00  |
|             |            | <b>Other Income</b>                      |            |             |
|             |            | \$130.00 Book Sales                      | \$450.10   |             |
|             |            | \$1,440.00 Donations                     | \$1,595.00 |             |
|             |            | \$279.54 Bank Interest                   | \$432.37   |             |
|             |            | - Royalty Revenue                        | -          |             |
|             |            | \$1,034.90 Social Activities             | \$952.95   |             |
|             | \$5,864.44 | - Sundries                               | -          | \$3,430.42  |
|             | \$2,884.44 |  |            | \$6,070.42  |
| \$19,986.50 |            |  |            | \$23,894.52 |
|             |            | <b>LESS PAYMENTS</b>                     |            |             |
|             |            | <b>Cost of Administration</b>            |            |             |
|             |            | \$528.00 Insurance                       | \$603.00   |             |
|             |            | \$80.00 Postage                          | \$116.00   |             |
|             |            | - Printing                               | \$38.40    |             |
|             |            | - Website                                | \$82.80    |             |
|             |            | - Stationery                             | \$5.25     |             |
|             | \$683.00   | \$75.00 Sundries                         | \$48.00    | \$893.45    |
|             |            | <b>Cost of Despatch / Reconnaissance</b> |            |             |
|             |            | \$271.60 Printing                        | \$514.50   |             |
|             |            | \$94.00 Postage                          | \$149.90   |             |
|             | \$465.40   | \$99.80 Other                            | -          | \$664.40    |
|             |            | <b>Other Expenses</b>                    |            |             |
|             | -          | Book Purchases                           | \$80.30    |             |
|             | \$904.00   | Social Activities                        | \$1,321.88 |             |
|             | \$110.00   | Subscriptions                            | \$305.00   |             |
|             | \$2,162.40 | - Sundries                               | -          | \$3,265.03  |
| \$17,824.10 |            | Balance at Bank 31 December 2011         |            | \$20,629.49 |
|             |            | <b>NOTE 3</b>                            |            |             |
|             |            | Total receipts for year                  | \$6,070.42 |             |
|             |            | Total payments for year                  | \$3,265.03 |             |
|             |            | Profit / (Loss) for 2011                 | \$2,805.39 |             |

**Paul Waterhouse**  
**President and Acting Treasurer**

## UPDATE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Welcome to the first *Reconnaissance* for 2012.

Since the AGM there have been some changes, with the resignation after 11 years of service of our Patron, Brigadier Philip Carey. Brig. Carey's contribution to the society has been significant, not only as our Patron, but as publisher of *Reconnaissance*, and, periodically, as a respected historical lecturer. His advice and friendship has been greatly valued by all in the Council and we thank him unreservedly for his contribution.

With Brig. Carey's departure, Dr John Twyford has taken responsibility for publishing the newsletter and he would greatly appreciate your ideas, feedback, and (especially) contributions.

Our program of events, see below, is proving successful, with a record turnout to Greg Beattie's lecture on the Punic Wars, and we hope upcoming lectures on the Boer War, Napoleon, and WWI aircraft will receive similar attention.

Unfortunately, we have had to cancel our proposed public speaking competition, but the Council still intends to hold an alternative promotional event at some stage in the future - details will be available here.

The Council is working well and we still have a few spots available – anyone interested in participating is welcome to apply.

I look forward to seeing you all at a meeting soon.

**Paul Waterhouse**  
President

## BOOK REVIEWS

### **DESERT BOYS by Peter Rees**

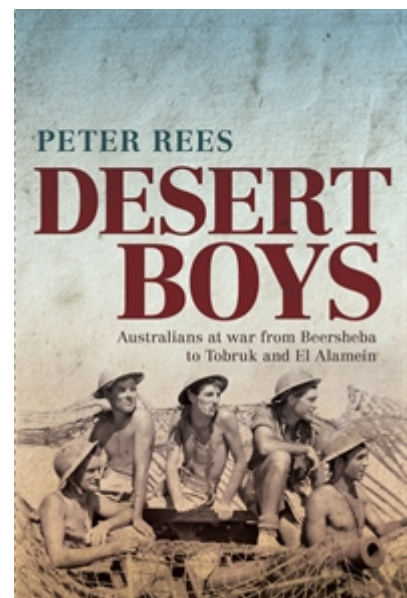
**Publisher: Allen & Unwin. 712 pp. RRP \$45.99 incl. GST**

This book is a response to the resurgence in readership for works relating to the engagement of Australians in wars. The work, however, could not strictly be characterised as a work on military history as it has a strong sociological flavour dealing with the circumstances of the mainly civilian soldiers who found themselves in the conflicts.

The author's thesis is that a substantial part of the fighting engaged in by Australian soldiers in the two world wars took place in North Africa and the countries bordering the Mediterranean. Much of the fighting was in desert or near desert topography – hence the title. The author does not suggest the Australian presence to be part of a continuum, and he resists the temptation to ascribe to it any mystical predestination. It is noteworthy, however, that many soldiers who fought in World War I were succeeded by their sons in World War II.

The book traverses the battles for Romani and Beersheba in World War I to the campaigns in Crete and Syria in World War II. Unlike most military histories the few maps included do no more identify the areas of conflict save for a detailed map of the dispositions of the formations at Beersheba.

The course of the various campaigns is described by a narrative connecting the personal episodes of the participants. Here the work is at its strongest encapsulating the personalities of the soldiers, their backgrounds, experience in the army and in many cases their deaths.



The material has been collected from previously published works, personal diaries, official war histories, unit records and perhaps most important of all correspondence between soldiers and their families. Much of this material is located in the Australian War Memorial and extensive notes appear at the end of the book identifying the source on the information on a chapter-by-chapter basis. The author approaches his task with the experienced eye of a journalist and it is this aspect that the book is most interesting. There are several hundred vignettes dealing with personal experiences and recollections and the names of the soldiers concerned are listed in the comprehensive index.

Many of the anecdotes and personal glimpses referred to are now part of folklore and others new to your reviewer. Space in this review allows for mention of only a few, including: The lack of respect by Australian soldiers for the English officers is mentioned in every book on this period and is not neglected here. One soldier camped at Romani (Egypt) wrote home to say that he could not wait to be sent to France where the soldiers were 'having a good time'! Major-General Harry Chauvel complained to his wife about not receiving a knighthood although he made the point that it was for her sake that he was disappointed. After correspondence between Chauvel and his superiors this oversight was corrected.

The disappointment of the Australian light horsemen is recorded after their early success in the first battle of Gaza was squandered by the muddling of the English commanders. Drivers of the legendary 'Furphy' water carts sat astride the tank and the need to outstretch their legs resulted in hernias. There was a strong spirit of chivalry between aviators in the desert war. In one reported instance an Australian pilot after crash landing was attacked by Arab looters and saved by his adversary landing nearby and driving off the looters.

One trooper attributed the success at Beersheba to the speed of the horses. The war photographer Captain Frank Hurley was so impressed with what he witnessed that he was constrained to say: 'Surely a nation must become great that breeds such men as these'.

Ominously the first chapter on World War II is entitled 'Unprepared'. As in World War I, the soldiers made copious use of the brothels. Your reviewer learnt two new expressions, namely, 'shifti kush' and 'zig-a-zig' neither of which appears in the OED. It would seem that the Australian nursing standards were higher than those of the English, especially in terms of patient cleanliness. There was a good deal of enmity between professional officers (Duntroon graduates) and militia or reserve officers. This enmity came to a head on the eve of the battle of Bardia.

As already noted the book does not purport to chronicle the course of battles from a strategic point of view but there some excellent descriptions of engagements from soldiers who did the fighting. This is particularly so in reference to the engagements at Beersheba and Bardia. Clearly, Sir Thomas Blamey was not a popular man.

One of the stories developed by the author concerned a father of eight children from NSW whose enlistment meant that he and his family were lifted from poverty as a share farmer by his army pay and allowances. In a very sensitive and charming way the book reproduces the loving correspondence between the soldier (now a corporal) and his wife, and the reader feels a real sense of tragedy when he is killed without ever seeing his youngest daughter.

By way of an example of the vivid short biographical notes, the following is offered: 'Among the men taking part in the attack [at El Alamein] was Percy Gratwick, a Western Australian private with a reputation as a practical joker. A prospector and farmer before enlisting, Percy sailed from Perth on 5 July 1941, leaving instructions that his horses were not to be sold or destroyed'.

The book is recommended as a good, lively and interesting read for the general reader. The detailed research undertaken by the author means readers with some knowledge of military history will find information that is of interest. For example, your reviewer was unaware of the issue of rum prior to battle in World War II. This happened before the battle of Bardia although it is not clear if this concession to pre-battle jitters was universal as seemed to be the case in World War I. The length of the book takes a little perseverance to complete.

**Dr John Twyford**  
**Publisher**

## **BATTLE SCARRED by Craig Deayton**

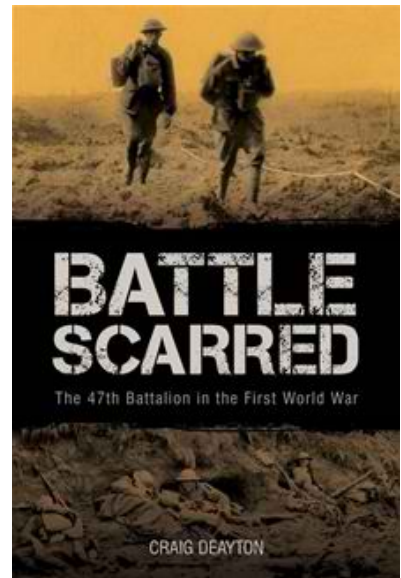
**Publisher: Big Sky Publishing Pty Ltd. 426pp. RRP \$34.95**

This work is the battalion history of the 47th Battalion First AIF. Your reviewer need say little more about the quality of the book than to repeat the comment of Dr Peter Stanley in the foreword to the effect that '*Battle Scarred* is surely the finest battalion history that [he had] ever read'.

The 47th was formed in Egypt in 1916 and disbanded two years later having fought at Pozieres, Mouquet Farm, the Somme, Bullecourt, Messines and Passchendaele. The battalion was disbanded in May 1918 due to the inability of the army to replace its lost men.

Not only does the author chronicle the formal events of the battalion's history but a great deal of attention is given to the detail of the lives of its members. Those members were in the main from Queensland with a significant number from Tasmania.

The first thing that a reader will notice is its quality of production. High quality maps and photographs are interspersed within the pages of the book at the relevant places.



An interesting fact was that the battalion in effect mutinied on route to Europe because of the filthy condition of the transport ship the Seang Choon. The voyage had to be delayed whilst the ship was cleaned. A number of deaths preceded these events. One was from viral meningitis attributed to the unsanitary conditions of the ship. The battalion was severely mauled at Pozieres with a loss of 367 men. The text does not 'pull punches' and the details of the removal of the battalion commander for perceived inadequacies in command at Mouquet Farm and Pozieres.

One of the difficulties faced by the author was the fact that as few as 50 members of the battalion left any written records of their experiences. The exception was Private Denver Gallwey whose archive rivals that of the Official History. In fact, Bean relied on Gallwey's writing for the history.

The author quotes Gallwey's considerable discussion of the failure at Bullecourt and notes that the Australians remained unconvinced about the utility of tanks. At some stage in the encounter the battalion band was sent into action playing a musical accompaniment to the advance. Gallwey described the effect of the German artillery response with five bandmen killed.

In May 1917 a private committed suicide, an event that appeared to have been hushed up and the cause of profound distress among the men of the battalion. After the battle of Passchendaele an officer was cashiered for cowardice and returned to Australia.

Throughout the book the text brings to life the members of the battalion and describes vividly the actions in which they were engaged. The book is highly recommended for students of the WWI and for those who have a personal interest in the 47th Battalion a must.

It is well indexed with detailed footnotes and a list of the persons who served in the Battalion. The Battalion was disbanded in May 1918 to the great distress of its remaining members.

**Dr John Twyford**  
**Publisher**

## ANNOUNCEMENTS / MEMBERS' NEWS

The Australian Heraldry Society has extended an invitation to members of the Military History Society to a lecture at 6.00 for a 6.30pm start on Friday, 11 May 2012 to be given by Ben Franklin. Titled 'Some More Personal Heraldry Royal Navy Badges', Mr Franklin will discuss the insignia of the various British naval ships in which he served as chaplain.

The Australian Heraldry Society meets in Sydney at:

The Sydney Mechanics School of Arts, Level 1, 280 Pitt Street Sydney.

Attendees are encouraged to bring along any heraldic books or artifacts they might care to display for the interest of others. A gold coin donation for refreshments and to assist with meeting the costs of the room is always greatly appreciated.

**RSVP** to the Hon. Secretary, Stephen Michael Szabo, at [secretary@heraldryaustralia.org](mailto:secretary@heraldryaustralia.org) or 0431 701 055.

## FROM THE PUBLISHER

There are some changes in the publication of *Reconnaissance* and from this issue I will be taking over the duties of publication. It is appropriate that at the outset I pay tribute to my predecessor Brigadier Philip Carey who established and maintained to high stand or the publication.

The publication is essentially the newsletter of the Society and the principal means of members keeping in touch with each other. Accordingly, contributions from members are welcome. The contributions need not be formal articles but short or long items of interest. Your opinions on past or present military issues would be especially of interest. Another category of material that would be welcome is the experiences of family members.

Please send any material to [john.twyford@uts.edu.au](mailto:john.twyford@uts.edu.au) or John Twyford 137 Arundel Street Glebe NSW 2037.

Members will recollect that in the winter issue of *Reconnaissance* we published a review of Dr Kevin Smith's excellent book *Stories from Sandakan*. Those of our members who have read the book and those who have an interest in the Australian POWs sent to Borneo during WWII will be interested to know that Kevin publishes a regular newsletter discussing issues related to that part of history.

The newsletter may be obtained by contacting Kevin at the following address: [helkev@tpg.co.au](mailto:helkev@tpg.co.au)

**Dr John Twyford**  
**Publisher**

## PROGRAM OF EVENTS

|                              |                |  |
|------------------------------|----------------|--|
| <b>Saturday 19 May 2012</b>  | Mr Les Perrett | Boer War: Conflict and Consequences                      |
| <b>Saturday 10 June 2012</b> | Mr Ben Howell  | A Steppe too far: Napoleon's invasion of Russia          |
| <b>Sunday 8 July 2012</b>    | Mr Pete Ryan   | Airfighting to modern warfare: The Western Front 1914-18 |