



# RECONNAISSANCE

Winter 2012

The Newsletter of the Military History Society of New South Wales Incorporated

Patron: Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of NSW

PRESIDENT: Mr Paul Waterhouse

SECRETARY: Ms Vashti Farrer

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

It gives me great pleasure to begin my report with the announcement that we have a new Patron.

Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of NSW, has graciously agreed to grant Vice-Regal Patronage to the Military History Society of NSW Inc.

She takes over from our previous Patron, Brigadier Philip Carey AM, RFD, ED (Retd), who stood down earlier this year.

As the Honorary and Regimental Colonel in the Royal NSW Regiment, Honorary Air Commodore of the No. 22 Squadron RAAF, and Honorary Commodore, Navy Warfare Training, RAN, the Governor has a direct interest in military matters. It is a great honour that she has accepted our invitation.

The Society has had a very successful few months, with a series of interesting and well-attended lectures.

A high point has been the record turnout for a regular monthly meeting when nearly fifty people came to hear our Vice-President Benjamin Howell talk about Napoleon's disastrous campaign in Russia.

Several new faces have been attending our meetings, and we have signed up about six new members already this year.

The Council is already planning the program for next year's lectures and continually looking for interesting new ideas and topics to present to our members.

We also collaborating with the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) over a series of events to commemorate the centenary of the 1914-1918 War, and will provide details of those events closer to the date. In the meantime, our two biggest events are still to come.

In September, Dr Chris Matthew from the Australian Catholic University will give our History Week Lecture on *How Arms and Armour Won the Battle of Marathon*, as part of the History Council's *Threads: They wore what?!?* theme.

In November, the Brigadier John Howard Memorial Lecture will be given by Professor Robert O'Neill AO, former Chichele Professor of the History of War at Oxford University and Official Historian of the Korean War.

Professor O'Neill will give us an assessment of conflict in Afghanistan, placing the current campaign into its historical context.

A full list of remaining events for the year is below.

I look forward to seeing you all soon.

**Paul Waterhouse**

## PROGRAM OF EVENTS

<b>Saturday, 11 August</b>	Mr Alan Kitchen	<i>Flying Australians to War: 58 years of the QANTAS RAAF Troop Transport Wing 1937-1995</i>
<b>Thursday, 13 September</b>	Dr Chris Mathews	<i>How Arms and Armour Won the Battle of Marathon</i>
<b>Saturday, 13 October</b>	Speaker to be confirmed	<i>Countdown to Armageddon: The Cuban Missile Crisis</i>
<b>Saturday, 10 November</b>	Professor Robert O'Neill AO	<i>Afghanistan: An Historical Context</i>
<b>Friday, 7 December</b>	Annual Christmas Quiz	
<b>Sunday, 20 January, 2013</b>	Mr Peter Grose	<i>Bringing it Home: Australia Under Attack</i>

## FAMILY MILITARY HISTORY

*In the autumn issue of Reconnaissance we announced a policy of publishing contributions by members giving family recollections of military history. In this way we hope to build up a corpus of oral history not otherwise recognised. The response has been good and here is the first such piece. We look forward to receiving more.*

### The Meaning of Anzac – A Personal View

**David Twyford**

*Address at the Anzac Day memorial service at Mosman RSL*

I am privileged to be able to address you on the eve of what I consider to be Australia's most important day – Anzac Day.

I don't think you need me to repeat all of the details of events on that distant shore in Turkey. We know only too well the casualty figures and the undaunted courage of the armies who contested a beach about the size of Bondi – British, Australian, New Zealanders, Indian, French, and, of course, the brave and later generous Turks.

I have titled this address 'A personal view' and that is just what it is – a description of how the approach and arrival of Anzac Day brings back to me the services and sacrifices of many of my relatives and friends in Australia's wars and emergencies.

Please don't think that this is some sort of hymn to the relatives of David Twyford. It is not – I am quite certain that every one of you would have similar stories to tell and mine is just an example of these.

I grew up as a small schoolboy during WW2 and my mother came from a family of ten siblings. This meant of course that eventually I had lots of uncles and older cousins who were of military age.

I'd like to give you a brief description of these relatives and how they fitted into the mosaic of my early life. I emphasise that not one of them would discuss the horror side of war but occasionally their feelings were revealed by the lost and distressed look in their eyes.

Two of my older uncles served in WW1 in France and were both wounded.

My uncle Sid was in Egypt about to go the Gallipoli when the evacuation took place and thus he was shipped to France.

The only story he told me was that when his ship arrived at the Port of Toulon he discovered a rather quaint French custom that he had not encountered in his native Australia. Evidently in that part of France toilet paper was delivered to those in need by young French *Mademoiselles* and he said it was a very pleasant first impression of France.

His later impressions were not so pleasant as he served in the Battle of Menin Road where he received several shrapnel wounds to the face. I revered him as a wonderful friendly man with a great sense of humour. Unfortunately I think the war caught up with him and he died at an early age of 63.

His son Sidney Jnr. served in New Guinea during WW2 but would never discuss the war.

My uncle Neil went to France and served at Passchendaele where he was wounded badly by gas. On his return he spent a year in hospital but never retained full use of his lungs eventually contracting tuberculosis requiring further long stints in hospital.

He worked as a tram driver for many years after WW1 but he had to give up in 1948 due to illness. He never gave in to self-pity and became a legendary fisherman and builder of superb fishing rods to supplement his income.

He told me a great story about how when they were in the trenches they were supposed to receive an issue of strong rum every day. The rum was delivered to the front line in containers by runners and was labelled 'S.R.D.' which meant 'Strong Rum – Dilute'.

During the journey to the trenches the runners sampled the wares and replaced their little tipples with water. By the time it got to my uncle and his mates it was just rum flavoured water. The men sent the containers back to the rear with their own caption on it 'seldom reaches destination.'

He knew I was interested in aviation and used to tell me how he watched fascinated by the battles with the 'Red Baron's' colourful circus over the trenches.

But that was not all – because of his indomitable spirit he lived into his 80's and was much loved by all who knew him.

Then we get to WW2. My cousin Neville served a tour of operations over Europe in Lancaster Bombers with the RAAF's No. 460 Squadron and was awarded the DFC after a raid on Darmstadt.



Unfortunately I did not meet him but his daughter gave me a copy of his logbook which in the understated times recorded briefly what must have been horrific experiences.

He was badly affected by the war and died at the young age of 42 in 1959.

My cousin Harold served in the RAAF as a wireless air gunner on Sunderland flying boats in Coastal Command in Europe. His father was Jewish and this he said probably saved his life.

The powers-that-be send most of his course to Bomber Command where most lost their lives but they thought that if he were shot down and captured he would have little chance of surviving as a prisoner. However his war was not without risks and he took part on the highly dangerous attacks on U-Boats and described to me the majestic sight of the invasion fleet on D-Day that they were assigned to protect. He was a wonderful, cheerful man who lived well into his 80s.

My cousin Arthur served in Tobruk, Alamein and New Guinea as an ambulance driver and stretcher-bearer. His only story of the war was of the day of the war's end and, he was placed on a charge for riding a bicycle around Victoria Barracks while drunk. I think his main mistake was to ride his bike through the Officer's Mess dining room at lunchtime.

Arthur was a marvellous man who lived into his 80s. He would never express any hatred for those he fought against although his younger brother died on the Burma Railway along with thousands of others.

Another of my uncles Gordon served in New Guinea and came back shell shocked and with a virulent strain of malaria that hounded him all of his life. Being a man of strong constitution he retained his sense of humour and lived well into his 80s.

His main story was how he liked to befriend American troops, as they were expert in distilling illicit alcohol.

## RECENT MEETINGS OF THE SOCIETY

*Members who are unable to attend our monthly meetings miss a very interesting experience and for that reason Reconnaissance will publish a short synopsis of the talks given, where possible.*

### THE ANGLO BOER WAR (1899-1902)

Britain entered the twentieth century in the grip of war and placed nearly half a million men (including Empire Forces) in the field in South Africa.

It was a conflict forced on the Boer nation of the Transvaal and Orange Free States to claim and control their vast mineral riches – gold, diamonds and associated commerce – and for the British to continue their march of colonisation at the height of Empire.

It was a bitter conflict and although the war ended with victory for the British and the annexation of the

My cousin Tom served as a gunner in the HMAS Tobruk in North Korea in 1952, bombarding the shoreline. His only comment was that the noise of their guns scared him as much as the enemy.

It was not only my male relatives who served in WW2 so let us not forget the role played by women.

My father's younger sister Joan served as a driver in the WAAF.

My cousin Jacqueline was the sister of Harold. She served several of the war years in the WAAF and just after the war married an Australian sailor named Tom who I mentioned earlier in the Korean context.

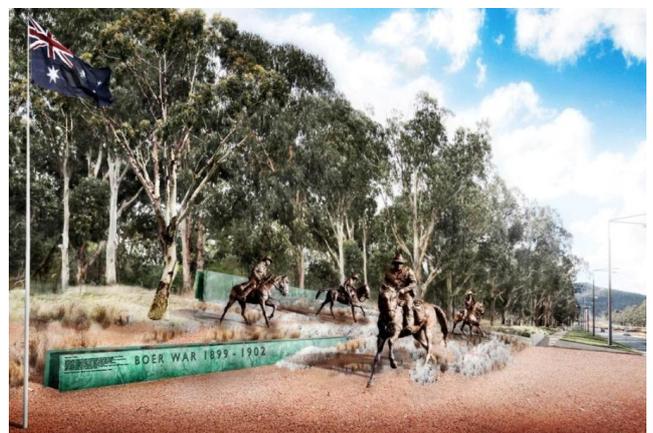
A great friend of my mothers, whose name was Phyllis served as a nursing sister in New Guinea and there became engaged to a young soldier only to see him die of scrub typhus – I remember her fondly as Aunty Phil.

My own military experience was probably typical of many who served between or after the major wars. I served as a RAAF pilot for 9 years and for most of us it was a case of long hours, days and years of boredom interspersed with the occasional moment of excitement.

My best friend in the RAAF Christopher was killed four days before Anzac Day in a flying accident and this gave the day an extra dimension for me. I have maintained contact with his parents in Canberra for over 50 years; his late father living a lifetime of grief over the loss of his only son.

My last three years of RAAF service was as a flying instructor and two of the young men that I helped learn to fly died in the Vietnam conflict, a rather sad postscript to my story.

So, as Anzac Day approaches, I think of all of these people and how lucky I was to know them as I know you will be with your personal memories. Thank you for your patience in listening to me and I know that on Anzac Day you will truly appreciate what it means to all of us.



Boer Nation, with the treaty of Vereeniging on 31st May, 1902, the fighting and tactics used, as the great Rudyard Kipling was to say, taught the mighty British Army 'no end of a lesson'.

Overall administration of the armed forces and modernisation of battle tactics were to change from that time forward.

Australia's involvement was significant, with a total of 23,000 Soldiers and Nurses going to South Africa and approximately 1,000 paying 'The Supreme Sacrifice'.

It was the first conflict in which we fought as a **nation**.

It also gave us great pride as a people in the achievements of our soldiers in battle and helped considerably in us realising the importance of nationhood and the fact that we were no longer a collection of colonial states.

There is great work currently being done by the National Boer War Memorial Association to build a

## BOOK REVIEW

**Anzac's Dirty Dozen**, edited by Craig Stockings, NewSouth, RRP \$35.00 incl. GST

This work is of a similar genre to an earlier work from the same editor namely, *Zombie Myths* (reviewed in *Reconnaissance*, Autumn 2011).

Whereas *Zombie Myths* dealt with specific incidents of Australian military history, *Anzac's Dirty Dozen* is concerned with twelve more general propositions of Australian military history that are not reflective of reality.

Each of the essays is written by an expert in his or her subject and argues that the misunderstanding of the past 'distorts our reading of the present' with potentially serious consequences.

The editor warns that the book may 'disturb or even offend'. Perhaps this is claiming too much for the book's power.

It is appropriate to turn to some of the myths under discussion.

**Craig Wilcox** reminds us that Australia had a considerable military history before the Anzac landing.

New South Wales sent 700 men to Sudan and from 1788 the urban population had an enduring love affair with the English redcoats stationed in the main cities.

**John Connor** is less convincing in his argument that the first AIF was not comprised entirely of volunteers. It is well known that attempts to introduce conscription failed and the author's argument depends on the proposition that family, social and economic pressures negated the voluntary aspect of joining the forces.

He is probably more correct in denying that volunteers are *per se* better soldiers. This ultimately depends on the level of training and quality of leadership.

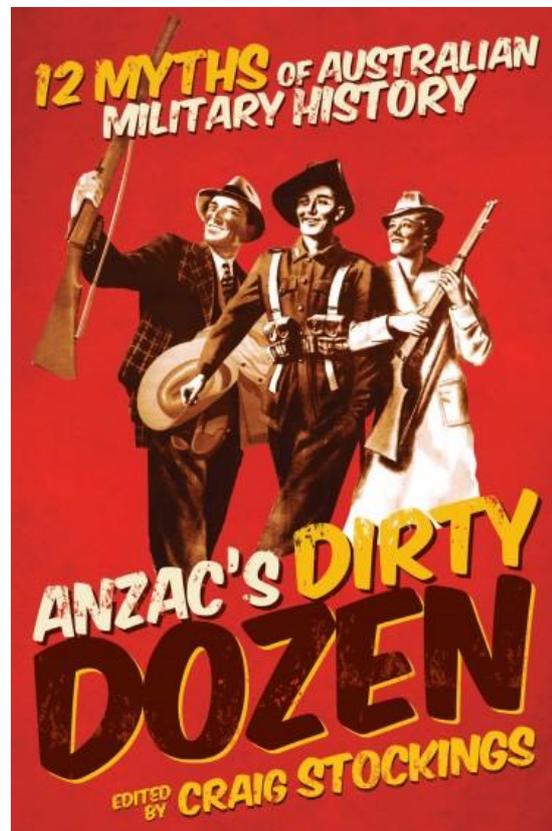
memorial to commemorate the Australian soldiers and nurses who served in South Africa between 1899 and 1902.

This will be on a site already dedicated on Anzac Avenue in our national capital Canberra.

This will be our **national memorial** – a magnificent design – to the only conflict that is not already commemorated on Anzac Parade.

As a people, we owe it to those who served in this **first war that we fought as a nation**, and ensure that they will be given the proper recognition and place in our history that they deserve.

L.H. Perrett  
National Boer War Memorial Association.



**Chris Clark** notes how easily Australians overlook the New Zealand participation in ANZAC. It was not always a happy union, even at Gallipoli.

Australia should remember that it was the highly accurate artillery fire of New Zealanders that 'saved their bacon' at Kapyong and Long Tan.

To this list might be added the effect of the New Zealand machine gun fire at Beersheba.

**Craig Stockings** discusses the oft-stated epigram that Australia has always fought in 'other peoples' wars. From the Boer War to Vietnam the author has demonstrated convincing reasons of self-interest for sending Australian troops to these conflicts.

**Eleanor Hancock** notes that the role of women in the Australian forces until recently has been marginal.

This seems to result from the attitude to women being exposed to danger in a combat role prevailing in Australian society at the time. It does not however diminish the role of women in the war efforts of WW1 and WW2.

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the book concerns another persistent myth to the effect that the conduct of Australian soldiers in battle was an extension of the game of cricket.

**Dale Blair** makes it clear that Australian soldiers were guilty of killing prisoners in WW1, WW2, and Vietnam.

The extent to which this conduct received official sanction is obscure although there is some documentary evidence that this was the case in operations against the Japanese.

Better training and the pervading presence of social media have meant that such incidents were fewer in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts.

**Karl James** questions the role allotted Australian troops in the Pacific after 1943 noting that they were mainly used for 'mopping up' operations.

This is not to diminish the significance of their role, but it leaves the suggestion that General MacArthur was reserving the glory for the Americans.

**Alistair Cooper** regrets the scant attention paid by historians to the role of the Australian Navy.

**Bob Hall and Andrew Ross** discuss some myths concerned with the Australian role in Vietnam.

First, in terms of jungle or night fighting (contrary to popular thought), the Australians were the equals of the Viet Cong.

Second; the legendary AK47 assault rifle was not as invincible as claimed.

The other particularly interesting chapter in the work concerns the proposition that Australian soldiers in battle 'punch above their weight'.

**Albert Palazzo** tests the proposition by a comparison of the Australian contribution to the Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts with that of other participants.

The comparison is not flattering with the Canadian contribution the more impressive. The Australian contribution often is in the nature of filling a niche rather than the provision of a self-sustained fighting force.

It seems not only the Australian public, but also the armed forces believe this myth with the attendant dangers. It would have been instructive if the chapter had been broadened to discuss our involvement in all engagements.

**Michael McKinley** criticises the United States / Australian alliance and questions the ability of the United States to come to the aid of Australia.

The work concludes with an essay from **Peter Stanley** questioning the Gallipoli landing as the 'birth of the nation' and noting the increasing 'commoditisation' of the Anzac brand.

For the centenary of the landing in 2015 the author looks forward to an era when careful study of Australian history will give prominence to other events of equal or more cultural significance.

He is not sanguine however and sees pop culture in the form of the government, media, authors and publishers entrenching the myth.

The clear warning is not to mistake legend for history.

It is doubtful if the work will 'disturb or offend' the serious student of Australian military history. The book does, however, make a plea for more serious scholarship into Australia's involvement into conflict.

It is not a book for a reader wanting to enhance his or her knowledge of Australian military history – but rather one for a student who wishes to participate in the wider debate about the nature of history itself.

Most of the factual content of the book is found in other sources. It is the view of the contributors that is of interest.

Here one must also take care not to throw out the baby with the mythical bathwater.

Myths still have an important place in our psyche. Most Australians are still inspired by the image of the man from Snowy River galloping full tilt down the hillside cracking his stockwhip.

Historically, in terms of those released, the storming of the Bastille did little for the cause of *Liberté, égalité, fraternité* but Frenchmen take 14th July very seriously.

**John Twyford**

"The clear warning is not to mistake legend for history."

## REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE

### ***Seeking a copy of a book***

Dear Dr Twyford,

I am seeking the location or loan of a book and wonder if you might include in the next issue of *Reconnaissance* a note.

The book is entitled '*An Account of the Corps from its Foundation to 1932*' by H. A. Burton, Corps Engineers.

An inter-library loan request has not located it. AWM do not have it and SME Museum have not heard of it.

My contact details are: [jkhaken@bigpond.com](mailto:jkhaken@bigpond.com)

Dr. J. K. Haken  
1 Jubata Lane  
The Arbour  
BERRY NSW 2535

Telephone: (02) 4464-1104

### ***Contributors for an Ancient History Encyclopaedia***

Hi John,

I know that a lot of the Military History Soc members are not ancient historians, but I was wondering if it would be possible for you to forward this email on to all of the members for me. If you could that would be great.

I have taken over from Matthew Trundle (Victoria University, Wellington) the role of co-editor for a new multi-volume *Encyclopaedia of Conflict in Greece and Rome* which will be published by ABC-Clio in 2015. The project is a massive undertaking – four volumes (two for Rome and two for Greece) with a word-count of over 1.1 million.

This will be a continuation of a number of other encyclopaedia-like volumes that have been released by ABC-Clio or its affiliates such as *The Encyclopaedia of the Hundred Years War* (2006) and *The Encyclopaedia of the War of the Roses* (2001).

## FROM THE PUBLISHER

As noted previously, this publication is essentially the principal means of members keeping in touch with each other.

We are keen to receive contributions from the members of the Society. Those contributions need not be formal articles but short or long items of interest.

It seems our pleas are having an effect as we have received a number of contributions and urge our 'historians' to keep up the good work.

I think our efforts should go beyond merely filling the pages of a newsletter. In a sense we are contributing to the oral history of the nation.

At this point in time I am looking for expressions of interest from anyone who may be interested in contributing to this work (at least the Greek half which is what I will be looking after).

I have attached a list of the topic areas\* that have not yet been assigned to anyone. You will notice that many of them do not have a big word count attached to them so they may not take a lot of time to write up if you are interested.

Feel free to take on as many (or as few) of them as you like. The topics will be allocated out on a 'first come, first served' basis so if you are interested in contributing, send me a list of the topics you would like to cover and I will mark those down as 'taken'.

This may be a good opportunity for post-grads to get a short (and relatively easy) publication entry on their CVs. As such, please feel free to forward on this email to anyone you think may be interested.

If anyone has any questions (or wants to contribute) please feel free to contact me either by email at [christopher.matthew@acu.edu.au](mailto:christopher.matthew@acu.edu.au) or by phone on (02) 9701-4450.

I can also send out a copy of a sample entry for people who do decide to contribute so that they can see the format/detail that should be used.

If anyone is more interested in contributing to the Rome volumes, let me know and I can put you in contact with the editors.

Chris Matthew

*\*Note: I have not attached the list of topics referred and any reader interested should contact Chris Matthew at the email address shown above.*

### ***Kevin's News***

Kevin Smith has advised that the August edition of his newsletter is now available.

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

Any of us who are parents or grandparents of teenagers will know that even written communications are an ethereal thing. Messages are now in the form of cryptic symbols on a cell phone. The expression 'C U l8r' is substituted for some endearing statement of affection.

Anyone familiar with the work of Patsy Adam-Smith will know that our knowledge of what war was really like came from the soldier's letters home. The cell phone and videoconference render letters passé and historians will be the poorer for it.

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.

***John Twyford***