



# RECONNAISSANCE

Winter 2013

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

**PATRON:** Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir AC CVO, Governor of New South Wales

**PRESIDENT:** Benjamin Howell – **SECRETARY:** John Twyford – **TREASURER:** Alan Kitchen

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## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Welcome to the Winter 2013 edition of *Reconnaissance*.

I would like to discuss the following topics in my report for this edition:

- Website and expanded internet presence of the Society
- 2014 Lecture Topics
- Joint Centenary of WWI Program with RUSI (NSW)
- Approach from ABC Radio

### Website and expanded internet presence of the Society

On 20 June 2013, we launched the Society's new website [www.militaryhistory.com.au](http://www.militaryhistory.com.au), as well as Face Book <https://www.facebook.com/MilitaryHistorySocietyOfNewSouthWalesIncorporated> and Twitter @mhsnsw pages.

The website can be used to view the details for upcoming and past speakers, access *Reconnaissance* online, access Useful Links, allow new members to contact the Society about joining, and also provide feedback to the Society.

Since the website went live, we have received a number of diverse enquiries across Australia from sources such as ABC Radio, military historians from interstate asking for assistance, groups asking for help regarding tracing family military ancestry, etc.

This is very encouraging as it shows that a wider audience is gaining an awareness of the Society, which continues to increase our brand awareness, leading to a more engaging and stronger Society.

I encourage you all to visit the website, Face Book, and Twitter pages, and inform your colleagues, friends, and family of our new found online presence.

## 2014 Lecture Topics

The Council is starting to put together our draft program for next year, so please let John or myself know if you have any suggestions for topics and/or speakers.

Yes, next year marks the centenary of the outbreak of WWI and we will have topics related to the events of 1914, however, I am interested in hearing from everyone so that we have a program that reflects as many of our member's diverse interests as possible.

### Joint Centenary of WWI Program with RUSI (NSW)

The Council has agreed to arrange and conduct a joint program to commemorate the Centenary of World War 1 with the Royal United Services Institute of New South Wales (RUSI NSW). The below joint program has been decided upon for 2014 – 2016 by both organisations.

**2014** – A half-day seminar focusing on the Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force (AN & MEF) with presentations on:

- Background
- Raising and deployment of the Force
- Disappearance of AE1
- Subsequent careers of participants
- Outcomes

**2015** – A half-day seminar focusing on Gallipoli post landing, with presentations on:

- AE2 Operations
- August Offensive including, Lone Pine, Hill 971 and the Nek
- Post August Offensive

**2016** – A full-day seminar focusing on the Somme Offensive with particular attention on Mouquet Farm.

More details will be provided as they become available.

### Approach from ABC Radio

I recently received an email from an ABC Radio producer who asked if the Society could help source speakers for a weekly segment they have on Tuesday afternoons between 3:40pm and 3:55pm regarding Australian Military History.

I said that we are more than willing to help, so long as we have an opportunity to promote the Society.

The segment is more focussed towards personalised stories of Australian military history and involvement of our servicemen and women, and the individual parts they have played.

I will be touching base with a number of our guest speakers to see if they would be interested in participating, however please contact me if you know of anyone who you think may be suitable so that we can workshop ideas with the producer.

As always, feel free to contact me on: 0418 400 825 or: [president@militaryhistorynsw.com.au](mailto:president@militaryhistorynsw.com.au)

**BENJAMIN HOWELL**

## PROGRAM OF EVENTS

<b>September:</b>	History Week <i>The Lost Diggers</i>	Ms Lauren Hewitt, Curator of Photographs Australian War Memorial
<b>October:</b>	<i>The Vietnam War: 'Sappers War'</i>	Mr Sandy McGregor
<b>November:</b>	Brigadier EJJ Howard Commemorative Lecture <i>The Centenary of the Royal Australian Navy</i>	Rear Admiral Tim Barrett, Fleet Commander Royal Australian Navy
<b>December:</b>	Members Christmas Quiz	

**Please note that the Society meets on the second Saturday of the month at 2:00 pm, Victoria Barracks, Paddington (unless informed otherwise)**

## FAMILY (MILITARY) HISTORY

Mr Harry Taplin continues the family history series commenced last year in *Reconnaissance*. The material is based on oral history recorded by Harry during interviews with survivors of the 60th Battalion, 15th Brigade, 5th Division, 1st AIF. Harry's father served in that 60th Battalion in WWI.

### THEY WERE ONLY PLAYING LEAPFROG

A member of the 15th Brigade related the following story.

We were stationed at Morlancourt early 1918. The official account of the Battle of Morlancourt doesn't mention the 15th Brigade but our 'B' Company held some of the line there.

The Prince of Wales reviewed the Division a few months previously. The Prince arrived wearing an Australian slouch hat a few sizes too big for him. It was not one of the prize ones but the thick heavy felt like the later floor covering Feltex. The Prince had some difficulty with his chinstrap. After introductions and a lot of saluting the Prince said to Pompey 'I hope your men are not cold.'

Pompey replied 'No your Highness they are quite warm they have been playing about they have been playing leapfrog'. Old Pompey seemed embarrassed and lost for words.

A more vivid account of the same incident was related by Corporal Curran who wrote: 'HRH turned his big round baby blue eyes on General Elliot and asked him if the men were cold'.

The General went coy and girlish and blurted out ‘No Sir they are quite warm they have been playing around – in fact Sir they have been playing Leap Frog.’ The Corporal likened Pompey to the girl at a country-dance where outside the hall there was a howling gale and heavy rain. The girl’s partner said to her ‘would you like to come outside for a breath of fresh air and a cigarette?’ She went all dithery ‘You know I don’t smoke and it will be cold out there, what about a game of leap frog’. [In early post Victorian times ‘leap frog’ may have been a metaphor for something more than healthy exercise.]

At any rate there was at the time a song *They Were Only Playing Leap Frog*. The song was popular in World War I and is used in the musical *Oh What a Lovely War*. The song is very unkind to staff officers and our readers who would like to hear it performed can go to YouTube <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Pg3rmmc243g>>

Shortly after the Prince’s review, the British Army disturbed the peace and harmony at Morlancourt. One day soon after midday we noticed British soldiers unloading three heavy trench mortars and what appeared to be cylinders of gas. Their Lance Corporal explained in a thick Scottish accent that it was an experiment to dispose of some cylinders of highly toxic gas. The plan was to turn on the taps and send the cylinders to behind the German lines. The corporal’s job was to open the tap a second a second before the mortar was fired. He didn’t appear to enthusiastic about his part in the operation.

The officer in charge gave the signal to fire and the three fired almost simultaneously. The flying cylinders sounded like the Southern Aurora. They seemed to travel in slow motion and landed just behind the German lines. Fritz sent up SOS flares and we received a dreadful pasting from their artillery.

This was when Tich (Jackie) Dean made his famous comment; Jackie turned towards the German lines and yelled, ‘Why doesn’t someone tell them we are only playing leap frog’.

**HARRY TAPLIN**

## ANZAC DAY ADDRESS

It is somewhat perplexing to understand why, in the last 25 years there has been such a popular revival of interest in WW1 or as it was known, The Great War. Perplexing, because the generation of Australians who suffered the awful bereavement of 60,000 war dead (8,000 at Gallipoli): the mothers, fathers, wives, lovers and siblings have all passed on. Only a handful of the children remain, themselves aged and with no direct recollection of their fathers; their only memory being of their mothers’ stoic courage and unrelenting grief.

Today we, and hundreds of other groups all over Australia, gather in the predawn around our monuments, our sacred sites, to remember an event which took place ninety eight years ago.

Is there another event in our history so well and faithfully remembered?

Remembered not only here in Australia, but at Anzac Cove itself; in New Zealand, which had lost 12,000 from its tiny population by the War’s end; more recently at the National Australian Memorial near Villers-Bretonneux in the Upper Somme province of France; and in at least thirty places in Britain whose Gallipoli dead numbered 20,000 and whose total war loss was more than three quarters of a million.

The excellent Australian historian and academic, Bruce Scates, has suggested that:

*In an increasingly secular society like ours it may be there remains a hunger for meaning, for the comfort of ritual, a search for transcendence much at odds with the materialism of our age.*

It seems also that we live by our narratives, both national and personal, some more skewed from reality than others: but in our stories and myths we deeply desire to see light, order, love, courage and life triumph over chaos, egotism and greed, disintegration and death. Perhaps this explains our attachment to the story of the Anzac Landing; both its myth and its reality.

The epic of the Gallipoli Campaign, by reason of the beauty of its setting, the grandeur of its theme and the unhappiness of its ending may continue to rank among the world’s classic tragedies. It is indeed an awesome story of lost or bungled opportunities, eventual failure, the death or maiming of many and the destruction of hope and happiness for many more.

This morning, rather than making reference to the frequently told story of the Landing, I will briefly recount an event of high drama and importance that occurred three weeks later and then relate it to a curious experience I once had on the battlefields of the ravine country of North Anzac.

By the end of May 1915 the extent of the Anzac beachhead remained much as it had on the evening of Landing Day: half a kilometre to the north of Anzac Cove, two kilometres to the south and a maximum penetration to the east of about a kilometre. A depressingly small gain, into which area were packed about twenty five thousand troops, short of water and food, with scandalously inadequate medical arrangements for the sick and wounded, the most primitive of sanitary provisions and a haphazard system for the burial of the dead.

The Ottoman Army held, and continued to hold till the end of the campaign, the high ground of the hill range of the Saribayir, (Sari Bair as the diggers knew it), and its artillery and sniper force took a steady toll of the Anzacs. The vital and solitary supply route to the perimeter, via Shrapnel and Monash Gullies, was defended by a number of posts along the edge of a steep escarpment known as 2nd Ridge. The names of these posts are part of our folklore: Russell's Top, Pope's Hill, and Quinn's, Courtney's and Steele's.

The loss of these positions would probably have necessitated the abandonment of the hard-won beachhead as well as catastrophic loss of life as the navy attempted an evacuation of tens of thousands of our people in broad daylight.

The garrisons of these posts had a cliff at their backs and strong Turkish positions close opposite. The enemy were equipped with a ready supply of factory made hand bombs which they used with skill. The Anzacs had only a meagre supply of bombs improvised down in the Cove from jam tins and scrap metal, which at times were quite as dangerous to the thrower as they were to the targets.

Further south at Lone Pine and Bolton's Ridge the Anzac defences were also violent, dangerous places but not quite so vital or precarious.

On the morning of Tuesday 18th May, a Royal Naval Air Service biplane flying along the Narrows of the Dardanelles noted a number of small troopships anchoring or berthing at Akbaşı Liman on the Western shore of this famous waterway.

The valleys, leading up to the crests where the Anzac posts were situated, but screened from their view, were packed with Turkish troops and long columns were marching from the south to join them.

When this was reported to the Anzac commanders they correctly assumed that a massive attack against their positions was imminent. Support troops and munitions were rushed up to the aforementioned posts and the garrisons were put on early standby, manning the fire steps and crowding the deep, narrow trenches, saps and access tunnels.

The moon had set just before midnight and the attack began in the small hours of the new day.

There were probably in excess 40,000 Turkish troops available and the defenders actually holding the line numbered something less than 13,000 but thanks to the momentous importance of the intelligence supplied by the naval air pilot, as a surprise attack it was a terrible failure. The Anzacs were fully alert, and eager to avenge a frustrating situation where they had been on the receiving end since the Landing.

The enemy attacked out of the darkness along the whole length of the perimeter but most heavily against the posts on 2nd Ridge at the head of Monash Valley.

Beating drums, blowing bugles and shouting their ancient battle cries: the long wailing Allahu ekbar! (God is great!) and the staccato Vur! Vur! Onlar Vur! (Strike! Strike! Strike them!), they continued to attack stubbornly despite the devastating rifle and machine gun fusillade from the Anzac line.

By daylight the attack had withered completely and the approach gullies opposite the perimeter were choked with Ottoman dead and wounded.

The dead and those who later died of their wounds on the Turkish side were estimated at 3000: on the Anzac side at 200.

With the presence of thousands of dead between the trenches, the days growing longer, and the ambient temperature rising, there was a certainty that the flies attracted to the decomposing bodies would soon be spreading pestilence to all the combatants. In addition some of the Turkish casualties were observed to be still clinging to life and their pitiful moans and cries were clearly audible.

The Australian 1st Divisional commander William Bridges had been mortally wounded by a sniper a few days before, and his replacement, Major General HB Walker, a fine and competent English regular soldier, at considerable personal risk, went out with a small party under a Red Cross flag to arrange a temporary truce in order to retrieve these unfortunates. Misunderstandings on both sides resulted in further casualties and after several days of suspicious negotiating, a formal truce was arranged for the daylight hours of the following Monday.

The relative success of this delicate and fraught operation owed much to the diplomacy of Captain the Honourable Aubrey Herbert, a tall thin short-sighted English officer who in civilian life had been a diplomat working in consulates in Albania and Turkey. He was a true eccentric and quite fearless and the Anzacs accepted him with humorous tolerance as 'a bit of a character'.

He was fluent in many of the dialects of the Altaic language group, variations of which most of the Ottoman officers and troops spoke, and his social connections, (he was a younger son of the Earl of Carnarvon), gave him access to the ear of the Commander in Chief, Sir Ian Hamilton, whom he had persuaded to agree, reluctantly, to the formal truce arrangements.

On the day, which was a remarkable success, with most of those of the dead which were lying along the narrow no-man's-land, being buried in hastily-dug shallow graves by digging parties from both sides, he was frantically busy.

Running rapidly between the opposing sides, arbitrating disputes, adjudicating, persuading, and making cheerful conversation. One of the onlookers said he resembled the parish bachelor who always appeared at Sunday School picnics to organise the foot races and award the prizes.

This was a scene of absolute carnage and the conditions, as you can imagine, were appalling, with the atmosphere tense and suspicious; but at the close of the truce, both sides retired to their respective fire trenches without further loss.

One of the Turkish senior non-commissioned officers, who recognised Herbert from his consular days, shook his hand in parting, and using a traditional farewell, said: 'Smiling may you go and smiling come again'.

I should explain that I have been visiting the battlefields for more than 25 years and have spent weeks engaged in historical field work in the ravine country of North Anzac, where vast battalions of the unknown dead lie. I frequently come across their poor, sad, relics in the new watercourses which the winter and spring rains carve in the yellow gravel, and in the subsided saps and trench lines.

From late October till the end of March when the cruel north winds blow and visitors are rare, the birds have migrated and the goatherds have driven their flocks to kinder pastures, the cold silent gullies and hill slopes have a brooding and vaguely hostile ambience. From Hill 60 in the north to Chatham's Post in the south, Anzac is virtually one extended grave.

One famous Gallipoli historian has written that in the solitary places of Anzac one is sharply aware of the sullen presence of the dead.

As part of the Anzac legend, much has been written and said, about the respectful relationship that developed between the Turkish troops and the Anzacs during the campaign, and this is now part of our folklore.

Gunner Frank Westbrooke, one of the Digger poets of the Gallipoli Campaign, gives some insight into the ambivalent attitude that the fighting soldier may sometime have had towards his opposite number:

*But war is war, and it's little to say*

*That our enemy played the game;*

*He fought as clean as a soldier may,*

*But I hate him just the same.*

I had been somewhat sceptical about this 'respectful' relationship, particularly as applied to the savagely fought but unsuccessful August Campaign.

Any examination of the primary documents – the personal accounts and diaries of the survivors of the savage fighting in the tortuous ravine country around Rhododendron Spur, the Kayaçikdere and the seaward end of the Damakçelikbayir suggest that the Turks chose not to accept the surrender of individuals, and they brutally treated the wounded and the prisoners they did take.

During this part of the campaign there is only evidence of bitter anger towards the kafirler, or infidels who had invaded their homeland.

Also, translations into English from the Ottoman Arabic script of Turkish military documents, only recently to hand, give the impression that Mehmetçik, as the Anatolian-born infantryman was nicknamed by his countrymen, and most of his regimental officers, had no particular awareness of our soldiers as being Australians or New Zealanders. To them we were all İngilizler (the English).

So to conclude, I will relate an experience I had about 18 years ago, which while it did in no way resolve for me the great paradox of both the brutality and high courage inherent in war, suggested that perhaps I should reconsider my scepticism.

It was a late Autumn evening, and in the failing light I was making my way across the old northern battlefields to the village where I was staying, when I was hailed by a shepherd two hundred metres away.

Now my knowledge of Turkish is useful but rudimentary and in telling the yarn, to try and give you the colour and atmosphere of the incident, I will repeat part of the conversation in that language.

Durun! Durun effendi! (Stop! Wait on sir!).

I stopped rather reluctantly, for I was anxious to get to the gravel road which would lead me home. It was nearly dark, and truth to tell, I felt a little uneasy about being out in the killing fields at night, in the sullen presence of the dead.

He left the flock and hurried towards me and I noted that he was carrying a young lamb on his shoulders – perhaps it was injured or ill. It was quite a biblical scene.

He was wearing a roughly made goatskin jacket and he was somewhat unkempt. He was to windward of me and he smelled as though he'd been sleeping in the sheepfold. We exchanged the greeting customary in rural Turkey and he laid the lamb down and gently put his foot on it. He then produced from his jacket pocket a handful of battlefield litter: shrapnel balls, spent bullets, the nose cone of a small shell and a few pathetic tunic buttons, which he offered to me.

I don't usually collect this sort of thing, but carried away by the somewhat esoteric moment I reached for my wallet to pay him.

While waiting eagerly, he made conversation: 'Are you from England?' and, when I told him that I was Australian, he firmly waved the money away. I was touched and a little embarrassed, so I offered him my hand and said: 'we are friends then, eh?' He gave my hand a rough warm shake and said with some dignity:

Yok! Yok! Degil akadasler! Biz kadesler! (Never! Not friends! We are brothers!)

Then as we parted he used exactly the same farewell, which the Ottoman Çavuş had bid Captain Aubrey Herbert, as they stood among the multitude of newly buried dead on 2nd Ridge eighty years before:

Ola güle güle gedeceksiniz, ve güle güle geleceksiniz!  
(Smiling may you go and smiling come again!)

## FURTHER READING

*Mons, Anzac and Kut* Aubrey Herbert London 1919

*Lost Anzacs* Greg Kerr OU Press 1997 (re treatment of Anzac prisoners)

*Official History of Australia in War of 1914–18* Vol 2 CEW Bean A & R 1934

*Gallipoli 1915 Bloody Ridge* The Diary of Mehmed Fasih Istanbul 1997

*Ataturk The Rebirth of a Nation* Patrick Kinross London 1993 (pp 78-80)

*Five Years in Turkey* Liman von Sanders Nashville US 2000. (pp 74-76)

(In his account von Liman accepts some responsibility for the failure of the May attack)

JOSEPH CRUMLIN

## BOOK REVIEWS

### DEATH OF A GENERAL

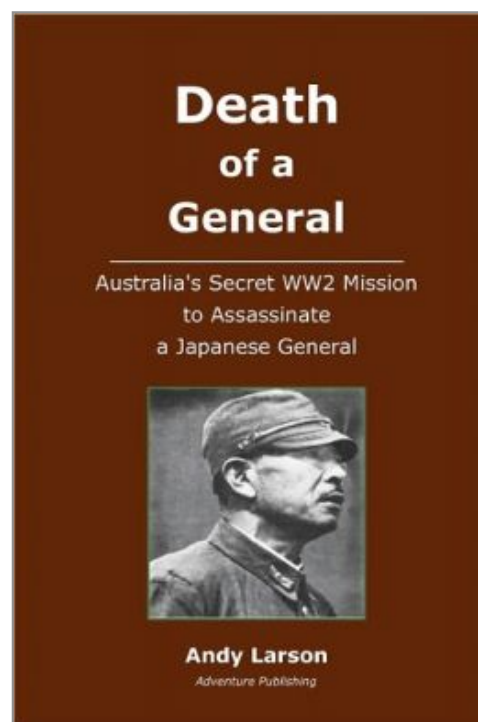
By Andy Larson

Adventure Publishers, 203pp, RRP \$US14.95

This book as with others including Rowland Perry's *Bill the Bastard* (reviewed in *Summer Reconnaissance*) do not fit exactly into the canon of military history writing. Generally speaking the writers of military history investigate and set out the facts of their chosen area of history and then add their interpretation of those facts.

That is not to say that an author will present a perfectly unbiased statement of historical fact. The facts presented in the first place need to be selected and then the author's biases, predilections and politics have a bearing on the final work. Here the author's work is based on historical facts and into those facts he has woven details of the actions conversations and thoughts of quasi-fictional main character.

The author gained the nucleus of the story from a person, who he named in the book Bluey. The author met the real Bluey on a social occasion but when he sought to glean more information for a book the person denied that the events related had ever happened and that indeed he had never left Australia during the war. This, it seems, is explained by the oath of secrecy taken by the character as a member of the Australian 'Z Special Force'.



The problem for the reader is to know when the author is exercising the literary licence he has given himself or stating historical fact.

Bluey, a member of the AIF, was sent to New Guinea in 1942 where his experiences on the Kokoda Track make harrowing reading. The author paints a vivid picture of General Blamey's comparison of the Australian troops to rabbits.

From there Bluey is transferred to 'Z Special Force'. In this unit Bluey was sent on two missions.

The first was abortive and it was on the second that the object was to kill the Japanese General Baba.

The reason for the mission was the apprehension that, as it was close to the end of the war, the General would escape punishment. Bluey is able to set up a situation that should have led to the General's death and he then escapes back to Australia. After the war he learns that the General was hanged for his war crimes. The historical record shows that there was indeed a General Masuo Baba who was hanged as a war criminal and that he survived at least one assassination attempt.

How much of the detail of Bluey's setting up the death of the General is fact is difficult to discern. It would seem that Bluey's attitude to his task was a pretty vindictive one. It was perhaps understandable at the time but now somewhat out of kilter with modern political correctness.

This may be the reason for the Australian authorities reluctance to admit an assassination plan. Notably the Americans were less squeamish about Admiral Yamamoto. Apart from the caveats stated above the book was a 'page turner' with something of an element of 'ripping yarns' about it. The descriptions of Bluey's trips to Borneo in a submarine were most interesting and your reviewer enjoyed reading the book.

**JOHN TWYFORD**

## **SIX THEATRES OF WAR**

**By Brian Boettcher**

**Self Published, 108pp, \$25.00**

An author writing a military history that is in fact a biographical sketch needs to decide how much emphasis will be placed on the central character as a person and the external situation in which the character is located.

This book describes the experiences of the Australian pilot Commander Nat Gould who served in the United Kingdom, Russia, Milne Bay, Darwin, the South West Pacific and Korea in and after World War II. Whilst a picture of a charming modest man emerges, the author has paid considerable attention to the details of his war experience and hence the title.

The young Nat paid for flying lessons at Archerfield near his Brisbane home by collecting manure and growing mushrooms that he sold at the local pub. At the outbreak of war he enlisted in the RAAF and after some pilot training sailed for Britain in December 1940.

After some service in England, in August 1941 was posted to 81 Squadron to take part in Force Benedict. The squadron was to be transported to Murmansk in the prototype aircraft carrier HMS Argus. The purpose of the expedition was to aid the Russia who had now entered the war against Germany.

That aid was to engage the Germans as a fighting squadron, to train Russian pilots in the finer points of aerial combat and to train their engineers in the intricacies of the Rolls Royce merlin engines fitted to the Hurricane fighters. Murmansk was a desolate place, however, the Russian hospitality was generous running to champagne, caviar, goose and venison.

An interesting aside was that the Russian pilots were a 'bit distant' as they resented kills by RAF pilots. It seems that the Russians were paid a bonus for each kill. No doubt an RAF kill deprived a Russian pilot – raising the question of whether or not there were enough Luftwaffe planes to go around!

On his return from Russia Nat was posted to Northern Ireland to patrol and protect shipping lanes. In May 1942 he returned to Australia and in August took part in the Milne Bay operation flying Kittyhawks. Here he suffered badly from the tropical illnesses endemic in that part of the world.

His next posting was back to Mildura in Australia training fighter pilots. Nat expressed his great concern to the author for young pilots is this aspect of their training as many were being killed in accidents. The allies were able to maintain a supply of pilots whereas the German and Japanese war efforts suffered from a severe shortage.

In October after much lobbying Nat was transferred to Darwin to fly Spitfires and his final wartime posting was flying Seafires from Australian and English carriers in the Pacific.

In the post war years he served in the Royal Navy before transferring back to the Royal Australian Navy. In 1951-1952 he was the Squadron Commander serving on the 'Sydney' in the Korean War.

As indicated at the beginning of the review that author has dealt in some details the surrounding circumstances to Nat's wartime experience. Two examples are the history and development of the aircraft carrier and the work of the wizard Australian code breaker Eric Nave.

The work is highly readable and will be valuable as a source book as it reproduces an excellent collection of extracts from logs, orders, maps and photographs.

**JOHN TWYFORD**

## THE MAKING OF THE BRITISH ARMY

By Allan Mallinson

Bantam Books, 734pp, RRP \$17.95 incl. GST

This book is the work of a retired British Major-General who has written extensively on military matters. As the title implies the book covers the period from the Civil War (1642) to the present day Afghanistan. That period represents the evolution from a 'scratch' army to a highly professional organisation.

As is to be expected the author's great affection for the institution shows through and in some senses the work takes the form of an apologia but equally he sees failure much as success as contributing to the army's present form. Where criticism is justified it is not withheld. The army came under the control of Parliament after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the ascension of William III to the throne.

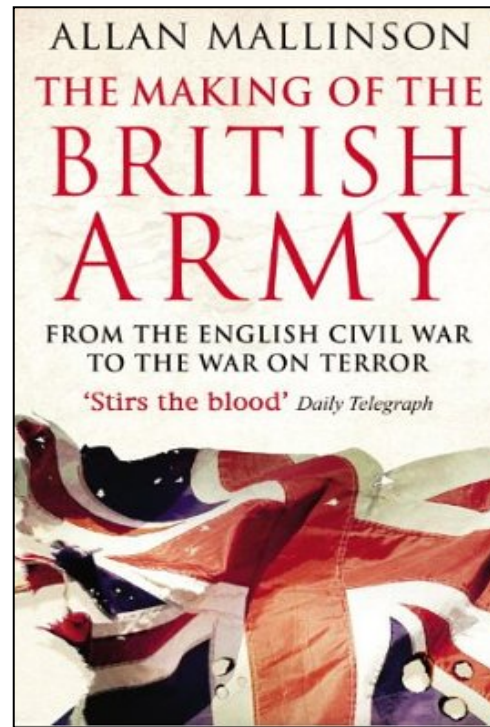
Throughout the work where appropriate, military incidents and terms are discussed. For example 'Coldstream' is a small town in Scotland that provided guards to protect William II, 'Grenadier, a grenade thrower and 'Fusilier' a soldier who first used a musket fitted with fusil (a prototype flintlock) as a firing mechanism.

The significance of particular battles is explained. The Battle of Blenheim was a superb example of tactics and aggression 'that could be said to have made the British Army'. Dettingen during the war of Austrian succession was the last battle where an English King, William II, commanded in the field.

Concealment and camouflage were first used against the French in North America and khaki was first used in 1867. The defeat of Generals Burgoyne and Cornwallis in the American Revolution profoundly changed English thinking in respect of the army. Henceforth the Royal Navy would be the prime strategic instrument and the army would furnish a few essential garrisons.

As one would expect the Battle of Waterloo receives a careful treatment. It would seem that one of the Duke of Wellington's most important attributes was his capacity of careful planning and caution. However he was not always in the forefront of modern thinking as he opposed the abolition of flogging and the sale of commissions.

The position in history of Lords Lucan, Cardigan and Captain Nolan is not enhanced in the work although the author concedes that the Charge was 'by no means the worst display of muddle and incompetence – of sheer unprofessionalism in war'. Even so, it must have been close to receiving that accolade! The description of the battle at Rorke's Drift is detailed including the technical details of the Martini-Henry rifle.



Later Lieutenant Chard was asked to give an account of the engagement to Queen Victoria and this document is, in part, reproduced. At Omdurman the British learnt the utility of Lee-Metford rifles and breach loading artillery.

The Boer War was not an unqualified success. What it did do however was remind the British authorities of a need for an overhaul of the army. For the first time a Field Service Regulations manual was promulgated. Perhaps the most serious outcome of the Boer War was that the Germans after observing the debacle became sanguine about their chances in World War I. The next debacle at Gallipoli taught the British something about the need for careful planning of amphibious landings – the payoff came although at another high price in the Normandy landings. Churchill's demise after Gallipoli saw him back in the trenches in France. There he realized the potential for tanks.

The author sees the Battle of Alamein as one of if not the most important battles in the history of the British Army. It did not repeat the mistakes of the Somme and success came through planning and confident leadership. The Northern Ireland experience taught the army a great deal about fighting in urban areas and another hitherto thought unnecessary skill namely how to be media-wise. The author is sometimes overcome by the temptation to tell a good story.

Near the end of the book one concerns a young bride seeing her husband off to the Falklands removed her blouse and bra and called out 'Feast your eyes while you can because you are not going to see them for a while'. The crane driver then manoeuvred the bra with the crane hook to her husband on the ship - to the delight of the crowd.



The work is packed with interesting details including short biographies and descriptions of particular incidents such as the winning of VC's. The text is well supported by colour plates, maps and a detailed index. It concludes with a discussion of the army structure and notes for further reading.

The author's 'Parthian shot' is aimed at the Ministry of Defence and its commitment to a 'peace dividend'. Whilst this excellent book is highly enjoyable to read it would equally find a place in libraries as a text. Your reviewer would like to express his thanks to Mr Les Perrett who kindly drew our attention to the work and provided a copy.

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## A FURTHER DONATION OF BOOKS

A friend of the Society has most generously donated to us a large number of military books from her late father's book collection.

The majority of these books are hard cover, in excellent condition and cover a wide field of military history. They are presently being catalogued and in due course will be available for purchase by members at one of our monthly meetings.

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## FROM THE PUBLISHER

In previous issues of *Reconnaissance* we have included short summaries of presentations of speakers at previous meetings. At our August meeting the speaker was Professor Brian Boettcher who spoke on his recent book *Six Theatres of War*. This was a biographical sketch of Commander Nat Gould. Commander Gould was present at the talk and added to the interest of the occasion. The substance of the talk is set out in the review of the book above.

Again I would like to remind our members that we are always on the lookout for material for *Reconnaissance*. I am sure that many will have family stories or personal experiences that would be worthy of publication. It is only through publication that these recollections will be preserved.

Much of what we know about personal experiences in wartime comes letters, diaries and photographs. In the future text messages, emails and mobile phone conversations will take their place and the task of the historian will become that much more difficult. Recently at the AWM I saw Peter Handcock's letter to his sister shortly before he was executed. There was something extraordinarily sad about it.

I doubt that this sadness could be preserved or conveyed electronically. Most striking was the handwriting, copperplate written by a man who in civilian life was a blacksmith and presumably with little education. My grandfather was a blacksmith and his writing was copperplate!

If you have recently read a book on military history please consider writing a review for *Reconnaissance*. This is a way of sharing your experience with others. Most of read books after some recommendation – often a review. If you are interested please contact me. Dr Kevin Smith has advised that the July edition of his newsletter is now available. The publication may be obtained by contacting Kevin at the following address: helkev@tpg.co.au.

**JOHN TWYFORD**

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