



The Royal United Services Institute of Victoria, Inc.
Promoting National Security and Defence
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RUSI VIC QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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Navy Picture

Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025

An Australian Army CH-47 Chinook aircraft lifts a M777 Howitzer gun from the flight deck of HMAS Canberra during the Combined Task Group 628.1 (CTG 628.1) amphibious assault during Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025 in Queensland.

Exercise Talisman Sabre 2025 was conducted across Australia and PNG from 13 July to 04 August. More than 40,000 military personnel from 19 nations participated in the exercise, primarily in Queensland but also in Western Australia, the Northern Territory, New South Wales, and for the first time, offshore activities will be conducted in Papua New Guinea. Talisman Sabre is the largest Australia-US bilaterally planned, multilaterally conducted exercise and a key opportunity to work with likeminded partners from across the region and around the world. Canada, France, Fiji, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Tonga and the United Kingdom are all participating. Occurring every two years, Talisman Sabre reflects the closeness of Australia's alliance and strength of our enduring military relationship with the United States and also a commitment to working with likeminded partners

Royal United Services Institute of Victoria Incorporated September 2025 Newsletter

RUSI VIC -2025

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Opinions expressed in the RUSI VIC Newsletter are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Institute.

President's Column

Major General Mike O'Brien CSC (Retd)



Our Library has been assessed as a collection of national significance. In order to increase public recognition, we have decided to rename the Library as the Monash Memorial Defence Library.

The renaming has been discussed with a wide range of stakeholders including General Monash's descendants. Renaming will not alter RUSIV's ownership nor its Deductible Gift Recipient status. A ceremony to mark the renaming is planned for at Victoria Barracks at 10.30 on Monday 20th October: if you wish to attend please apply to the Secretary at secretary@rusiv.org.au.

Monash was an enthusiastic member of our Institute. As a Lieutenant in Victoria's Garrison Artillery, he was a foundation member of the United Service Institution in 1890 and its Honorary Secretary from 1895 to 1897. As Secretary He edited the monthly *Journal of the United Service Institute of Victoria* and contributed several important papers to it

In May 1895, a Naval and Military *Conversazione*, under the auspices of the Institution, was held in the Melbourne Town Hall. This function, for the organisation of which Lieutenant J. Monash was almost entirely responsible, took the form of a comprehensive exhibit of naval and military stores and appliances grouped under the headings of torpedoes, ordnance, gunnery, musketry, field engineering, submarine mining, signalling, tactics, army service and ambulances and continuous demonstrations and lecturettes by the officers in charge of each group. There were also held on the main platform a series of demonstrations of signalling, ambulance work, spar bridging and fuse

testing. RUSIV holds Monash's original correspondence for this event.

General Monash was elected a Patron and an honorary life member of the Institution on 22 April 1931.

Mike O'Brien



The RUSI Needs You

Book Reviewers Wanted

Due to the generosity of Australian and overseas publishers, RUSI – Vic Library finds itself swamped with copies of books that are required to be reviewed. To lighten the load and spread the workload, we are urgently seeking members who are prepared to assist with this task.

It matters not that you have never reviewed a book before – we can provide you with easy-to-follow guidance.

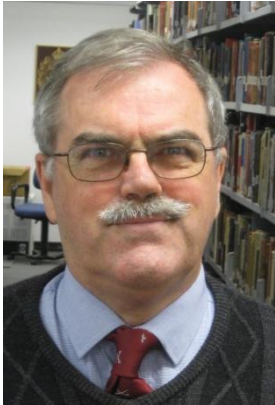
As benefactors of their generosity, we have an obligation to the publishers. They are often looking for a review to include in their publicity for the launch of a new title – so timeliness (a reasonably short turnaround time) is expected.

If you feel you can assist, we would be delighted to hear from you.

Please contact the Secretary Bob Hart, by email: secretary@rusiv.org.au

From the Secretary:

Lieutenant Colonel Bob Hart RFD

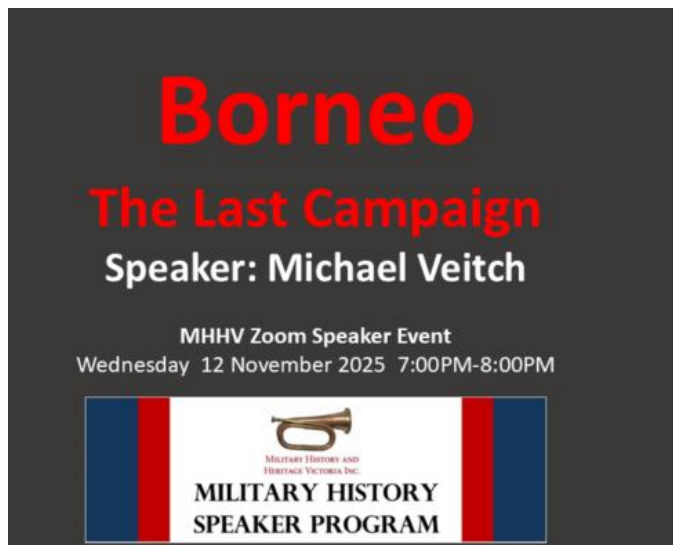


We have been notified of the passing of the following,
 Anthony Sell
 Bill Crawshaw
 David Bullard
 Jim Eldridge
 Neil Whybrow
 Alan Heggen

We welcome the following new members

Rhonda Day
 Paul Lang
 Garry Saunders
 John Nettleton
 Greg Sergeant
 Alexander O'Brien
 Morgan Bendelle-Gilovitz

Bob Hart



Library Notes

In the last report I mentioned the use of our scanner for various projects. This has continued to be a rich source of rare and unique material. In addition to diaries held by the RSL library we have scanned personal military relevant material for private individuals. These are unique or rare personal narratives, some of them handwritten originals and some transcribed. The scanning process usually improves the readability due to enlargement and, if necessary, adjustment of contrast. If any members possess such original material we would be happy to scan it to PDF and, with permission, include it in our library. As always the service is free but a donation to RUSIA (Vic) would be appreciated. Anyone who would like to see the recording of the talk by His Excellency Vasyl Myroshnychenko Ambassador of Ukraine to Australia delivered to RUSIA (Vic) in May 2025, click on the link below or copy and paste into a browser.

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/0jmd65isox7kpcuszafg0/RUSIA-Vic-H.E.-Vasyl-Myroshnychenko-Ambassador-of-Ukraine-to-Australia-24th-April-2025-ANZAC-House-SD-480p.mov?rlkey=yjyv1yp768ol10rkfrz4iefp7&st=1e8j9236&dl=0>

Best wishes to all

Brian Surtees

Hon Librarian

Bequests

Royal United Services Institute of Victoria

The Royal United Services Institute of Victoria was established in 1890. It seeks to promote informed debate on and improve public awareness and understanding of defence and national security.

The Institute maintains a specialist library to assist in this, as well as scheduling regular lectures and visits of interest. The costs of doing so, however are becoming burdensome and are exacerbated by an ageing and declining membership.

To allow us to continue to provide services to members and the community into the future, you could greatly assist us by remembering the Institute in your will. Should you desire assistance in adding an appropriate codicil to your will, please contact the Secretary at secretary@rusivc.org.au. If you have added a bequest to your will, it would be of assistance to be advised of it (not the specific amount) in case we need to communicate with you or your executor

Opinion: Defence and the Economic Roundtable

Mike Rawlinson

The US Defense (War) Secretary Pete Hegseth has said that Australia should increase defence spending to 3.5 per cent of GDP. This would recognise the security challenge posed by China and be a fair contribution to the security of the Asia-Pacific.

Australia's strategic situation has progressively deteriorated as spelt out in the 2020 Strategic Update, the 2023 Defence Strategic Review (DSR) and the 2024 National Defence Strategy (NDS). While the urgency of acquiring new capabilities has been emphasised current defence funding has barely changed. The government has committed to the future funding of the AUKUS submarines but has funded contemporary aspects by cancelling projects within the defence budget.

Responding to the US call for an increase in defence spending the government position has been that how much we spend on defence is a matter of sovereign decision making based on capability not some arbitrary percentage of GDP. However, GDP percentages are a recognised indicator of a nation's commitment to its security, and Australia's 2.1 per cent is far less than warranted by its perceived security challenge. If the needed capabilities already identified in the DSR are costed, an amount of at least 3 per cent is indicated.

If NATO accounting methodology is used our 2.1 percent GDP spend increases to 2.8 per cent. This is mainly due to the inclusion of military pensions and veteran's benefits.

The government's three-day Economic Reform Roundtable in August highlighted pressing economic challenges facing Australia. Among key budgetary concerns were rising healthcare costs, funding the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), the growing financial demands of an ageing population, environmental challenges, particularly the impacts of climate change and navigating the complexities of the transition to net-zero energy. Security issues included the need to strengthen defence in an increasingly complex strategic environment. Technological challenges centred on adapting to Artificial Intelligence and ensuring Australia remains competitive in a rapidly shifting global economy.

Key themes discussed were economic productivity, sustainability, and resilience. The treasurer spoke about urgent but longer-term challenges, such as intergenerational equity in the taxation system, the affordability and supply of housing; the pressure to fund health services the NDIS and aged care. Also, the demands of the net-zero energy transition; and future defence funding. Tax reform was needed to incentivise effort and innovation.

There was enthusiasm for a reduction of red tape everywhere, environmental approvals for mining (green tape) and multi-agency approvals related to housing. While there was no indication that some sacrifice will be necessary, or of any areas that the government may reduce spending, consensus was achieved that action is required. Momentum for reform was certainly started, although there was no sense of urgency.

The Roundtable did not address either industrial relations or energy policy, both of which are vital factors in determining productivity.

GDP per capita is a good proxy for productivity, and in Australia it is declining. Key factors determining productivity are innovation, investment and the ease of doing business. Intrusive regulation, high energy costs and industrial relations have stymied new investment.

Industrial relations should have been discussed as most business groups believe that the government's reforms have been regressive and are a major impediment to increasing productivity and competitiveness.

Energy policy should also have been discussed as energy affects all aspects of the economy including defence. A strong defence requires a strong economy. The military also needs to be able call on secure, reliable and sustainable energy supply in respect of future operations. This applies to electricity, gas and to liquid fuels.

Under current energy policy, the cost of energy has continually increased, not only for households but also for mining, manufacturing, transport, communications, and commerce. The transition to renewables, solar and wind, has been much more expensive than envisaged and has required thousands of kilometres of new transmission lines. Perversely the energy transition has involved public subsidies to renewables, power consumers and coal fired power stations.

In the National interest, if Australia is to afford the defence force it urgently needs, economic reform must be undertaken without delay and must include energy policy.

It is not just the US, that is interested in our commitment to defence. In China, no doubt PLA Strategic Planners will be assessing as to whether the ADF could inflict unacceptable losses upon a hostile force in various scenarios. Deterrence is about an enemy's perception of capability times will. Currently Australia does not score highly by either criterion.

To be prepared for war is one of the most effective means of preserving peace. George Washington
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Battle of Britain Address Melbourne Shrine 21st September 2025

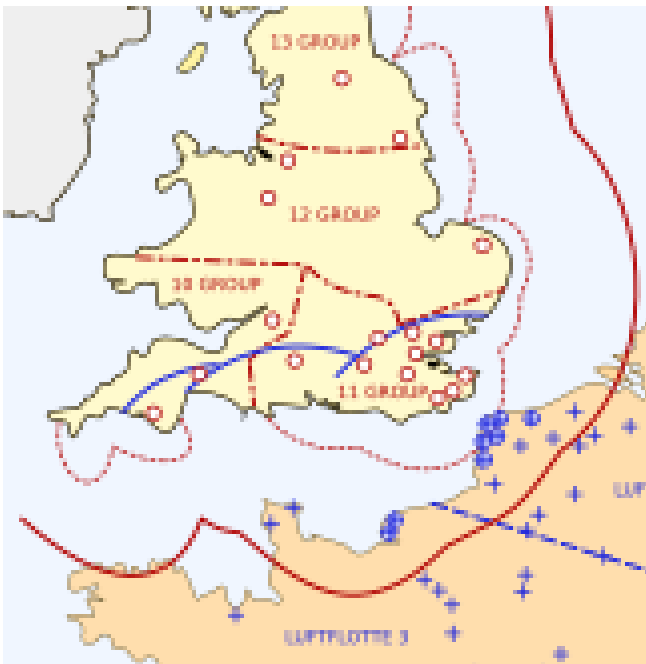
Brian Surtees

The Battle of Britain fought in 1940, was, in the words of the Duke of Wellington, after a battle fought 125 years earlier, "The nearest run thing you ever saw in your life."

Adolf Hitler issued a directive to Goering to destroy the RAF and its bases to enable an invasion on the 15th of September.

Adler Tag or Eagle Day on the 11th of August signalled the start of the main air offensive. It was estimated that success could be achieved in two weeks.

Facing the Luftwaffe were 11 Group Sqns defending London and the southeast, supported by 12 Group to the North, controlled from Duxford, and 10 Group in the Southwest. The coordinated defence system included the Chain Home radar network, the Royal Observer Corps, the sector control rooms and the anti-aircraft artillery. The RAF fighter force was outnumbered by approximately 4 to 1 by the entire Luftwaffe force based in northern France.



The 18th of August was called the hardest day when 625 RAF fighters were confronted by 2000 plus enemy in repeated raids. 12 Group squadrons were supposed to protect 11 Group airfields while the 11 Group intercepted the raids. This did not work very well as 12 Group Squadrons were slow to form up and get into position. The result was that over several days, 6 of the 11 Group stations were bombed almost to extinction, and in some cases were out of action for up to a week.

Among others, Manston, Biggin Hill, Tangmere, Kenley, Debden, were all very badly damaged with many casualties on the ground.

In the week ending the sixth of September, the RAF lost 161 aircraft, with 103 pilots killed the Luftwaffe lost 189. This was a rate of loss of RAF strength of 10% per week. Replacement pilots sometimes had only 20 hours of experience on the Hurricane or Spitfire during their operational conversion training. It was not unusual for these pilots to be killed during the first few operational sorties.



A stark example of this is experience of Ross Price, a young pilot reporting to his Squadron. As another squadron member recalled, the Commanding Officer said to Price "Don't worry about your sleeping quarters, we will organize that later. Grab a bite to eat and get down to the flight line. We are on standby, and we have lost three pilots this morning, so you are on" The squadron got airborne at 2 o'clock and at 2:15 Ross was dead.

On the other side of the coin was John Gibson, a much more experienced pilot who had been shot down no less than 4 times and was the acknowledged expert on getting out of aeroplanes while still airborne!

As a result of an accidental dropping of bombs on London on the 24th of August, several raids on Berlin were mounted by RAF Bomber Command. These caused few casualties and little damage but had a great psychological effect and humiliated Goering. Hitler directed that the bombing effort be switched to London. The first raid on London after this directive occurred on the 7th of September. On this day, the controllers at 11 Group did not realise in time that the bombers were headed for London and not RAF airfields; therefore, the squadrons were initially sent to the wrong area. The Luftwaffe raids on London were largely unopposed and devastating.

Also on this day, the joint intelligence committee noted more dive bombers arriving in France from Norway and the movement of invasion barges to Calais.

At 8:07 PM, the government issued the code word "Cromwell", which meant that an invasion was imminent.

Bombing raids and bitter aerial combat continued over the next week, and the Germans considered that a maximum effort on the 15th of September would finally overwhelm the RAF, destroy the morale of Londoners and permit the invasion to go ahead within a few days.

The 15th of September dawned fine and clear. On this day, Air Chief Marshal Dowding's defence organisation and Fighter Command got everything right. 11 Group squadrons intercepted the first raid as AVM Park left his airfields undefended and directed maximum effort at the incoming raid. It was on this occasion that Winston Churchill, who was present in the Sector Control room at Uxbridge, asked AVM Park, "How many reserves are there?" to which Park replied, "None, Sir." AVM Leigh Mallory's 12 Group squadrons arrived in time to intercept the raid as the bombers approached London; the raid was broken up, and many German aircraft jettisoned their bombs and returned to base. 200 RAF fighters were engaged. Goering had told his crews that only 50 serviceable Spitfires remained. The afternoon raid was met by 300 RAF fighters and similarly disrupted. The RAF claimed 185 Luftwaffe aircraft destroyed; the actual number was about 60, against RAF losses of 21, of which 13 pilots survived.

The Luftwaffe bomber crews, with grim humour, had a saying: "Watch out, here come the last 50 Spitfires - again"

Fighter Command had demonstrated that it was not defeated, and although they did not realise it yet, they had just won the Battle of Britain, and there would be no invasion. The Luftwaffe mounted another raid on the 18th September, which was also defeated with a loss of more than 50 aircraft.

The blitz continued until May 1941, mostly at night, causing many deaths and much destruction. Fighter Command started the Battle with slightly less than 3,000 pilots. About 2,300 were British Commonwealth. The others comprised large contingents of Poles and Czechs, as well as significant numbers of Belgians and French. There were also pilots from neutral countries, Ireland and the United States. Well might Churchill have said, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few"

For the aircrew, ground staff, and civilians. It had been frightening, dangerous, and for many, lethal. The vast majority bore it with courage and did their duty, and that is why **we will remember them.**

Book Reviews

This newsletter has seven Book Reviews. On behalf of members the Editor thanks the reviewers. The Royal United Services Institute of Victoria Library thanks authors and publishers for providing copies for review. If you would like a hard copy of a review, please contact the Secretary.

The Secret Submarine

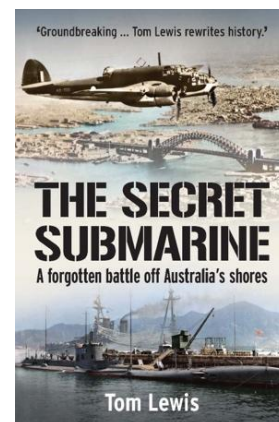
A forgotten battle off Australia's shores

Tom Lewis

Newport, NSW: Big Sky Publishing, 2024

Paperback 218pp RRP: \$19.99

Reviewer: Adrian Catt, May 2025



There's a lot to like about this book. Although Tom Lewis states that the structure and content are arranged in a 'jigsaw' fashion, I found this read pleasant owing to its clarity and broadly encompassing interesting facts, figures, tables, and plot. Of course, the focus is the narrative of the events leading to the sinking of Japanese submarine *I-178* by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Beaufort bomber crew off Coffs Harbour, New South Wales in 1943.

Tom Lewis has made considerable effort, successfully, to engage and educate the reader with fascinating information, including:

- What submarines and their crew do,
- How submarines operate,
- What it means to be a bomber crew,
- Bombing tactics and limitations, and
- The human cost of war.

Also provided are useful tables quantifying all manner of Pacific War facts and figures, such as:

- Total deaths by belligerent, service, and campaign, and
- Specifications and model types of the various warring submarines and bombers, and their respective functions and roles in the Pacific during World War II.

The author 'sets-the-scene' of the 'happy hunting ground' which the Imperial Japanese Navy, (IJN), submarines operating out of Truk, Micronesia, had off the East coast of Australia, targeting many merchant ships and other vessels. Coverage is also given to how submarines and bombers fought each other; in turn their offensive and defensive armaments, tactics, successes and failures.

This book is comprehensive, and I feel it is a very good introduction to readers of the Pacific War, and *most* suitable for novice Secondary School students, as it reads clearly and in straight-forward terms, as well as providing useful knowledge for seasoned readers of Military history.

In summary: an enjoyable read!

Give the Bastards Hell

The Battle for Milne Bay New Guinea 1942

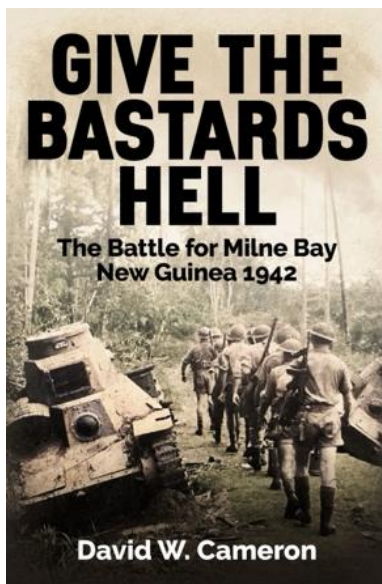
David W Cameron

Newport, NSW: Big Sky Publishing, 2024

Paperback 440pp RRP: \$34.99

Reviewer: David Rees, May 2025

Winning the battle for Milne Bay in New Guinea in August/September 1942 was a significant moment in Australia's World War II campaign to stop Japan's military expansion southward and prevent its intended conquest of Papua New Guinea.



In this book, the author describes the battle for Milne Bay and outlines the command issues and strategies involved in the campaign. When General Douglas MacArthur was appointed Allied Supreme Commander South West Pacific Area (ASCSWPA), he advocated the construction of tactical airstrips at Milne Bay and Buna so that close air cover and ground attack capability could

support the allied ground troops protecting Port Moresby.

The main Japanese pincer moves on Port Moresby were expected from the north from Buna along the Kokoda Track and the east via Milne Bay. Unfortunately, the Buna area was unsuitable for an Allied airstrip, so construction didn't proceed. However, in June 1942, construction did start on one airstrip on the north coast of Milne Bay. It was just as well, because on 23rd July 1942, the Japanese successfully landed at Buna and

Gona and advanced along the Kokoda Track towards Port Moresby. Consequently, the Allies quickly made plans to construct two additional airstrips on the north shore of Milne Bay to counter any attack from the east.

US airfield engineers from the 43rd US Engineer Regiment undertook the construction of the three airstrips at Milne Bay. The engineers were soon joined by infantry units from the Australian 7th Militia Brigade (*9th, 25th, and 61st Battalions*) plus some gunners, engineers and airmen from RAAF 75 Squadron and 76 Squadron with their Kittyhawks. From 25th July, 1942 onwards, the RAAF was able to operate from the No 1 airstrip.

With the completion of No. 2 & No. 3 airstrips in mid-August, it was deemed prudent to reinforce the Milne Force with infantry units from the 18th AIF Brigade (*2/9th, 2/10th, and 2/12th Battalions*). The two Australian infantry brigades of 4,500 troops and other units of over 4,000 servicemen (including 1,365 US) came under the command of Australian Major General Cyril Clowes. They soon built up their defences and preparations for an expected Japanese attack.

As the Allies' HQ predicted, about 2,000 Japanese marines landed at Milne Bay's north shore on the night of 26th August 1942 east of No. 3 airstrip. Another 700 more marines landed later. Their main objective was the capture of all three allied airstrips. However, they were fearlessly resisted by the Australian troops, US servicemen and the pilots of the RAAF fighters and bombers, who drove the Japanese back to their landing ground.

By the 4th - 5th September 1942, some 1,300 Japanese marines were evacuated by sea by the Japanese Navy from Milne Bay. The battle was the first Allied land victory against Japan, proving that the Japanese ground troops were not invincible. Over 600 Japanese were killed, while the Australians suffered 321 ground casualties, of whom 123 were killed.

In analysing and researching the Milne Bay battle, David Cameron pays meticulous attention to the details of each firefight. He utilises extensive historical references, 24 pages of endnotes, and a range of maps and photographs that enhance one's ability to follow the battle's progress. The book is a tribute to the bravery, devotion, and sacrifice of those who fought in such horrid jungle conditions. Overall, it is a must-read for anyone interested in or studying the warfare and military history of World War II.

Start Digging You Bastards!

Australian and New Zealand forces' desperate battle
with Rommel
and the Axis at El Alamein

Tom Gillling

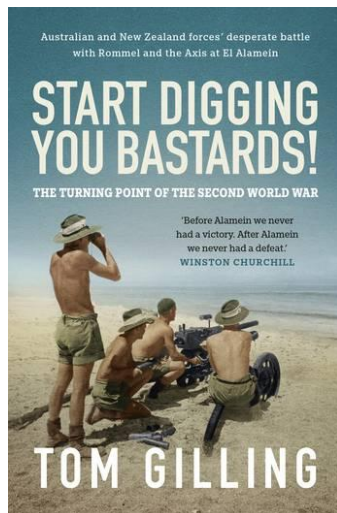
Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2025

Paperback 320pp RRP: \$34.99

Reviewer: Robert Dixon, July 2025

This is a very well-written account of the battles which took place at El Alamein in 1942 with a focus on fighting involving the 9th Australian Division and the 2nd New Zealand Division. A feature of the book is that the author seamlessly weaves together the experience/stories of individuals with unit histories.

The work begins with a brief description of fighting in September 1940 when Italian forces attacked Egypt, the subsequent retreat of the Italian forces westwards into Libya and the arrival of German forces in Africa in early 1941, the siege of Tobruk and the eventual retreat of British and Commonwealth forces eastwards towards Cairo, stopping their retreat at a defensive line between the coast at El Alamein and the Qattara Depression in mid-1942. This defensive line, unlike others in the desert, could not be turned by a flanking manoeuvre.



The book then gives a lengthy discussion of the First (July) and Second (October-November) battles of El Alamein while appropriate attention (over 50 pages of the 290 pages of text) is also given to events in the period between the First and Second Battles. The work includes a fine description of a key decision during the Second Battle when Morshead (the commander of the 9th Division)

decided to disengage the 26th Brigade which was in contact with the enemy in an area dubbed 'the Saucer' but was taking very heavy casualties and replace them with the relatively fresh 24th Brigade (24 Bde). This move took place on the night of 31 October/1 November and resulted not only in a stabilisation of the front but also provided a base for a successful attack by the Australians towards the coast. The fighting at the Saucer by the 26th and then the 24th Bde not only inflicted heavy casualties on Axis units but also drew key German formations northwards and made possible the breakthrough to the south of their position by the Indian and New Zealand infantry and British Armoured forces.

The successful replacement of the 26th by the 24th Bde at night (and in only one night) is a testament to the wisdom of Morehead and to excellent staff work on the part of the senior officers at Division and the brigade levels. The title of the book refers to the move of the 24th Bde into the Saucer where the author writes: 'The new men [soldiers of the 24th Brigade] could hardly have been encouraged by the advice they received from the departing troops [soldiers of the 26th Bde]: 'Start digging you bastards, or you'll be sorry!'

As Gilling points out, much of the fighting at El Alamein resembled First World War battles of attrition with the infantry experiencing a high number of casualties. Such was the significant role given to the 9th Division in the

fighting that although they made up only 10% of the Eighth Army's troops they accounted for 20% of the total Eighth Army's casualties – a testament to the ferocity of the fighting and the bravery shown by the soldiers of the Division.

The book has a short *Bibliography*, a very adequate *Index*, 18 B&W photos and three maps. Unfortunately, the most important map, titled 'El Alamein' takes up only one-half of a page with important features indicated by very small lettering. This map ought to have been spread over the whole of a page. Another problem with this map is that the position 'Trig 22' – a location where action by the Australian troops is described in two chapters of the book - does not appear on any of the maps.

While reading this account of the fighting at El Alamein, I was often reminded of the earlier book by M Johnston and P Stanley titled *Alamein: The Australian Story* which was published by Oxford University Press in 2002 (a copy is held in the RUSI(Vic) library). Johnston and Stanley's book provides more detail of the fighting at the company and platoon level and has more and better-quality maps. Having said that, I think that someone with no prior knowledge of the subject and wanting to read about the decisive role of the Australian - and New Zealand - troops at El Alamein would benefit from starting out with the 'over-view' provided in the book by Gilling. One reason I say this is that Gilling devotes a little more attention than Johnston and Stanley to topics such as the role of 'interior minefields and the practice of having 'left-out-of-battle officers. He also covers the experiences of Australian and New Zealand soldiers who were captured at El Alamein and became prisoners of war. On the other hand, Johnston and Stanley talk about the 9th Division's parade and march-past at Gaza in December 1942 which Gilling does not. I think this was such an important (and rare) event that it should be mentioned in any account of the activities of the 9th Division at El Alamein, not least because it provides an opportunity for the reader to be made aware of the laudatory address to the soldiers made by General Alexander - Commander-in-Chief Middle East - at the time. That event is a very suitable way to end the story.

How Drones Fight

How Small Drones are Revolutionising Warfare

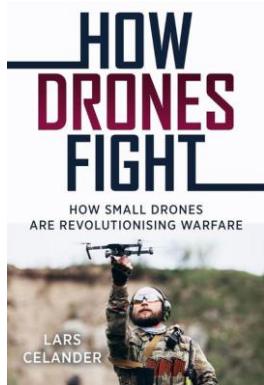
Lars Celander

Pennsylvania, US : Casemate Publishers, 2024
Paperback 208pp RRP: \$41.50

Reviewer: Robert Dixon, July 2025

In this very well-written and informative book the author covers both the capabilities and the limitations of many different types of drones with most attention being given to small drones and their tactical use on the battlefield. He details the different navigation, communication and sensor systems that are currently in use and the various weapons a drone can be equipped with. He not only covers the offensive use of drones but also examines the various detection methods, tactics, and weapons currently utilized in counter-drone warfare.

Two chapters describe what drones have contributed to recent wars with one chapter examining the war in 2020 between Armenia and Azerbaijan and the other chapter examining the on-going conflict involving Russia and the



Ukraine. This is the longest chapter in the book and is very informative although I notice that there is no discussion of the use of fibre-optic cables to overcome jamming of radio links between the operator and the drone.

The last two chapters in the book outline likely future developments in drone technology and present conjectures on what the future of drone warfare may hold. An interesting feature of the book is that it includes an explanation of the use of some of the drones in the context of the OODA loop (observe, orient, decide, act) decision-making model developed by USAF Colonel John Boyd - see [John Boyd \(military strategist\) - Wikipedia](#).

Lars Celandner served in the Swedish military as a systems engineer and worked as a design engineer in radar and radio communications after his military service. Given his background in physics and engineering he is well placed to write in a straightforward way about the various types of drones and their uses.

The publication of this book is especially timely given that it has become obvious to all that small tactical drones have revolutionized ground combat as any soldier or combatant could now find themselves in a position to operate or defend against drones. Given what I have just said, it is most unfortunate that in the *Preface* to the book that the author writes 'The book is only about how things actually work, offering no recommendations on policy, acquisition, training, or organizational matters, suitable conclusions are left to the reader'. Since the book is essentially descriptive and that many of the descriptions involve numerical measures that readers might benefit from the inclusion of a table or two to allow them to see how different drones compare across various criteria or, even better perhaps, a visual comparison by way of a 'radar chart' as used by (say) R E Simpkin in his 1979 book *Tank Warfare* and in his article 'When the Squad Dismounts' in the US Army's journal *Infantry* in Nov-Dec 1983 where he applies a triangular version of a Radar Chart

([Radar chart - Wikipedia](#)) to compare the firepower, protection and mobility of different armoured vehicles.

The book has a useful glossary and a very comprehensive bibliography - I notice that the author writes that one of the main sources of reports that he relied upon was the British 'Royal United Services Institute'. While the book does have an index, it does not include any person's names so that "OODA loop" is in the index but not 'Boyd, J' to give just one example. Having said that, the index is very useful for looking up the pages where the reader will find information about a particular drone.

Oboe One, Tarakan, 1945

An Australian Tragedy

Peter Stanley

Newport, NSW: Big Sky Publishing, 2025

Paperback 415pp RRP: \$34.99

Reviewer: Neville Taylor, June 2025

Tarakan is a small island off the East coast of Borneo (pre-war, the Dutch East Indies). By 1945 General MacArthur, intent on recapturing his beloved Philippines before tackling the Japanese mainland, wanted to establish bases and airfields to support his efforts whilst eliminating any possible Japanese interdiction to his operations.

With Australia's 2nd AIF on Australian soil, MacArthur convinced Prime Minister Curtin and the military leaders, the troops should be used to liberate the Dutch territories by a series of amphibious landings (Operation Oboe One to Six). After undergoing intense training in Queensland to prepare for the operations, convoys



approached the island in late April 1945, awaiting preliminary reconnaissance and mine clearing of beaches before landing on 1 May on the slimy mud that constituted the beaches.

Fortunately, the landing was unopposed as the unknown number of Japanese moved inland to their prepared defensive positions. The landings were fraught with impossible conditions as well as restricted access and congestion of personnel and bogged equipment on the beachheads. The three infantry battalions of the 26th Brigade Group (2/23, 2/24 and 2/48 Battalions) and the 2/3 Pioneer Battalion then began laboriously moving to their inland objectives, suffering high casualties from the entrenched Japanese soldiers, as well as mines and booby traps and prepared demolitions. Aerial and artillery support prior

to infantry attacks played a major role in demoralizing the Japanese defenders.

The airfield was secured by the end of the first week and the restoration of the heavily crated airstrip (by Allied bombing) was commenced, with the first landings possible on 28 June. Clearing the remaining Japanese resistance was extremely slow conducted over steep and treacherous jungle-covered terrain. On 15 June, the Japanese abandoned their headquarters, and battalions commenced limited preparations for repatriating soldiers back to Australia. The first contingent left on 28 July. The last action on Tarakan was on 3 September, but almost 200 Japanese came out of the jungle between then and late December. The Oboe One Force was earmarked to become part of Oboe Six, but this never came to pass.

Approximately 1500 Japanese were killed during the operation that saw 240 Allied deaths. Tarakan was never used for the stated reasons for its invasion. A futile undertaking one may well argue.

Peter Stanley has again demonstrated what is required in a military history. There is a succinct history of Borneo, sufficient clearly labelled maps and a generous selection of photographs. The 547 references appear as *Footnotes* and are complemented by four *Appendices: Order of Battle, Casualties, Roll of Honour and Bibliography*.

This was an Australian military endeavour probably unknown except by those who lost loved ones on Tarakan. But they deserve the recognition that Stanley has sought for them in this recent work.

Sword

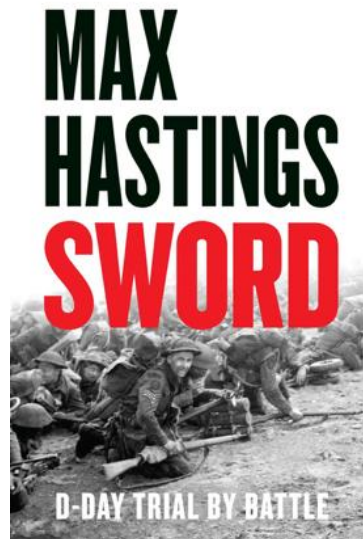
D-Day Trial by Battle

Max Hastings

Sydney, NSW: Harper Collins, 2025
Paperback 384pp RRP: \$17.99

Reviewer: David Rees, August 2025

Many books have been written and films made about the Allied invasion of Normandy on D-Day, 6th June 1944, and the battles fought on the beaches of Utah and Omaha (*American*), Juno (*Canadian*), Gold and Sword (*British*). However, only a few books have been devoted entirely to describing the battles on a single beach. Films and books such as *The Longest Day* by Cornelius Ryan, *D-Day* by Antony Beevor, and *Band of Brothers* by Stephen Ambrose to name but a few, have done much to educate readers and audiences about D-Day overall, with a lot of emphasis on the role of the Americans, who made up the largest Allied contingent. So, it's refreshing to read a book on just the Sword landing beach, which is devoted to describing in detail



the success of British forces in establishing a defensible beachhead on D-Day.

For background, the 28,845 British troops assigned to the Sword assault sector consisted of the 3rd Infantry Division, comprising the 8th, 9th and 185th Brigades, supported by field units of the Royal Artillery and engineers as well as tanks of the 27th Armoured Brigade, troops of the 1st and

2nd Special Service (Commando) Brigades, and paratroopers and gliders of the 6th Airborne Division. Additional fire bombardment support was provided by offshore RN ships and RAF fighters and bombers.

Max Hastings is a well-known journalist and historian who has written many military history books, including one on D-Day. He has won many prizes for his lifetime contribution to military literature. One award in particular was the RUSI Westminster Medal, awarded in 2008 for his authorship of military campaigns. He excels at describing both the big picture in his usual critical style and writing compassionately about individual experiences in war, so his books are easy to read. This book, is well illustrated, with good maps, reference notes, an order of battle, a bibliography and an index. He vividly describes the various battles in the Sword sector and analyses the effectiveness of the British troops in achieving some of their objectives on D-Day. His analysis is both critical and praiseworthy, drawing on his insight developed through years of research and interviews with veterans.

For example, he controversially argues that the coordination training undertaken by British infantry and tanks before D-Day was inadequate. There was too much emphasis on just getting onto the beach intact. Also, over 50% of the British soldiers trained were battle-inexperienced having never been committed to battle in the five years since the start of the Second World War. At the same time, some of the older veterans from the fighting in North Africa suffered from war weariness. In consequence, the speed of inland advance of the British battalions in Normandy tended to be 'cautious, hesitant, slow, dilatory and fearful of loss'. The planned objective of capturing the key road, rail, and canal city of Caen by the end of D-Day was not achieved, and it took until the 9th July before the Canadians and British occupied it. This outcome led to the Americans complaining that the British and General Montgomery in particular, lacked drive and determination in Normandy, especially as US casualties there up until 20th June, were 24,162 as compared with 13,872 for the British. Nevertheless, lessons were

quickly learnt and many of the other British objectives were successfully achieved, such as the capture of the Caen Canal and Arne River bridges and the assault on the Merville Battery, or preventing the German 21st Panzer Division from reaching the sea between the Canadian and British beachheads.

For those interested in Second World War European Military history, this is a must-read book.

War

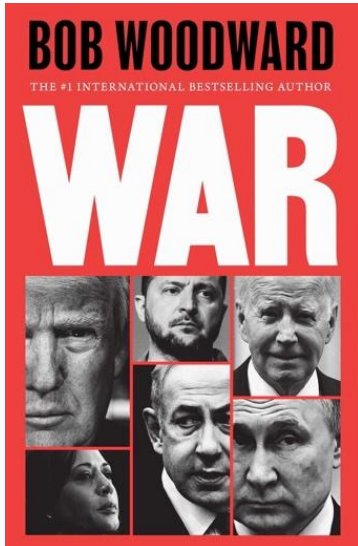
Bob Woodward

Cammeray, NSW: Simon & Shuster, 2024
Hardback 448pp RRP: \$55.00

Reviewer: Neville Taylor, August 2025

This is a most remarkable account of how President Biden and his national security team strove for four years to drive a foreign policy that provided warnings of impending moves by belligerent powers, supported allies whilst ensuring that no US forces were involved in any overseas conflict. There were no scandals to investigate, just an incredible insight into the incredibly demanding efforts behind the scenes as the President worked for his people, his country and our world.

Biden had borne the brunt of criticism for the chaotic US withdrawal from Afghanistan in July 2021. He had been Barack Obama's Vice President in 2013 when Putin annexed the Crimea – with Obama failing to take Putin's actions seriously. At the G20 in late October 2021, Biden outlined to major European leaders the intelligence that the US had on the Russian build-up on the Ukraine border and how Russia intended to make the remainder of Ukraine become part of Russia once more. The majority of attendees and President Zelensky were highly sceptical that Russia would invade. Biden was prepared to diplomatically dissuade Putin from his invasion, while at the same time ensure the US was prepared for any possible eventualities in terms of supporting Ukraine.



Within three weeks of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) responding to the Hamas raid on October 7, 2023, Biden pleaded with Netanyahu to allow the continued supply of essentials to flow into Gaza, but to no avail. On 1 April 2024, the IDF killed the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps in Damascus, Syria and the White House began the wait for the Iranian response against Israel. The Iranian Operation True Promise was launched on 13 April 2024 with 150 drones, 30 cruise

missiles and 110 ballistic missiles all timed to arrive over Israel at the same time. Biden's team had organized a coalition with France, the UK, Saudi Arabia and Jordan with combined anti-missile capability that defeated attack on Israel.

Politically, Joe Biden was under great pressure from his political foe who had had the 2020 election stolen from him. Attacks on his son weighed heavily on his time as President, and despite his 'open to all ideas' approach and prepared to listen to all contributors, his last two years in office affected him physical and mentally. The low point came with the disastrous June 27 debate against Donald Trump and a month's delay (to 21 July) did not do Kamala Harris' presidential campaign any favours. The 13 July rally at Butler, Pennsylvania witnessed an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Trump, and this saw his stocks rise and his election fund grow considerably when he appeared with his bandaged right ear at the Republican Convention on 19 July.

Woodward went to press prior to the debates between Trump and Harris taking place. He has been unstinting in the thoroughness of his coverage of Biden's presidency. It can almost be read with the urgency of a mystery thriller – the chapters are short and cover each critical incident over the almost four years. His decades as a topline journalist are evident in the profound research he has undertaken to write War. Maps of Gaza, Israel and its neighbours and Ukraine lead the text, and there are sixteen pages of excellent coloured photographs (including 'that right ear'). There are 34 pages of *Source Notes*, and a highly-detailed 23-page *Index*.

A most valuable insight for those interested in 'behind-the-scenes' of an American president and international politics.

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New Acquisitions (since June 2025)

Books reviewed in this *Newsletter* have not been included

Title	Author	Subject	
<i>Her Great Adventure</i>	Janet Scarfe Sister.	Dorothy 'Puss' Campbell WW2 Army	Nursing
<i>South Pacific Air War Vol 6</i> Ingman	Michael Claringbould March 1943.	Wau to Bismarck Sea January to	and Peter
<i>Ceylon at War 1939-1945</i>	Ashley Jackson		
<i>Military History Supremo</i> (Eds)	Joan Beaumont and AM FASSA.	Essays in Honour of David Horner	Garth Pratten
<i>Anzac Guerrillas</i> humanity in occupied	Edmund Golrick	A World War II story of resistance, Europe.	hope and
<i>Survival in Singapore</i>	Tom Trumble Australia's greatest commando	The triumph and tragedy of operation.	
<i>Assault Brigade</i>	Matthew E Miller Brigade in World War II.	The 18th Australian Infantry	
<i>Drawing Hell</i> Moore.	John Morthen	The Life of Australian War Artist	Alan
<i>Operation Biting</i> Hitler's radar.	Max Hastings	The 1942 parachute assault to	capture
<i>Max Dupain</i>	Helen Ennis	A portrait.	
<i>Australian Heroes of</i>	Mark Johnston courage.	Remarkable stories of battlefield <i>World War II</i>	
<i>Action Stations</i>	John R Francis	Horsham joins the Navy.	
<i>The Air Mobility Workhorse</i>	Bill "K9" Kourelakos operations.	The first fifty-five years of C-130	
<i>A Military History of</i> <i>Victoria, Australia</i> 1803-1945	Bob Marmion and Andrew Dagg	Gibraltar of the South.	
<i>The Art of War and Peace</i>	David Kilcullen and warfare.	The changing face of 21st-Century	Greg Mills
<i>Nation, Memory, Myth</i>	Steve Vizard imaginary.	Gallipoli and the Australian	
<i>The Big Fix</i>	Albert Palazzo	Rebuilding Australia's national	security.