



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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## Missile firing - HMAS Sydney

Picture from the Independent Surface Fleet Review

**Royal United Services Institute of Victoria  
Incorporated  
March 2024 Newsletter**

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

## From the President:

### Major General Mike O'Brien CSC (Retd)



We have recently received the good news that our defence lease of our premises has been renewed until the end of March 2025. In the meantime, Defence's internal review of its property holdings (including Victoria Barracks Melbourne) has been completed and is currently awaiting Ministerial decision

We are just preparing for the visit of our patron the governor of Victoria. She will be shown some of the treasures of our collection.

I would like to thank our retiring Councillor Peter Wickham who has moved to Queensland. He was a very active contributor to RUSI Victoria. If you would like to put your name forward for this casual vacancy please contact the secretary.

### Mike O'Brien



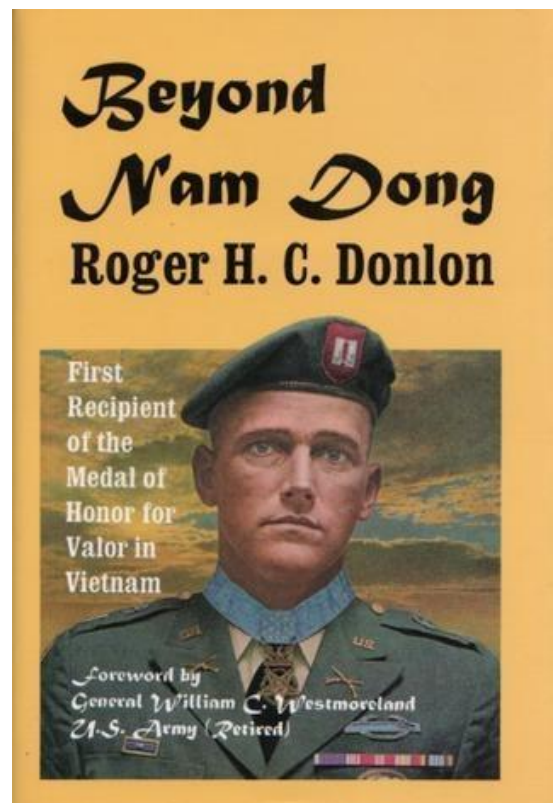
**MAJGEN Jason Blain DSC, AM, CSC  
Luncheon Address  
Thursday 29 February  
Army's Response to the Defence Strategic Review**

## Medal of Honor Winner Roger H.C. Donlon

The winner of the first Congressional Medal of Honor for the Vietnam War has died recently. Our library has a copy of his autobiography which he had signed.



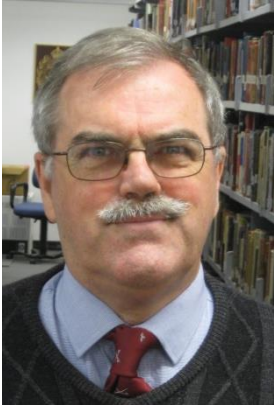
*Retired Army Col. Roger H.C. Donlon poses next to the bust supporting his Medal of Honor after a ceremony held in his honor at Eglin Air Force Base, Fla., on Dec. 5, 2018. Donlon, the first American to receive the Medal of Honor in the Vietnam War, died Thursday, Jan. 25, 2024, at the age of 89. (Sean Hall/U.S. Army)*





## From the Secretary:

### Lieutenant Colonel Bob Hart RFD



March already! Where does the year go? Next thing it will be Easter.

Still, we keep on keeping on.

Membership continues to improve and we welcome the following new members.

Michael Halpin  
Adrian Jones  
Peter Duff  
John Gower  
Ash Graham  
Lorenzo Marasco  
Adrian Catt

We have not been notified of the passing of any members since the last newsletter.

Details of our April Lunchtime Address are in the separate flyer.

Please note that as ANZAC Day falls on the last Thursday in April this year, we have brought the talk forward to 18th April.

**Bob Hart**

### 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@rusivic.org.au](mailto:secretary@rusivic.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 executors.



### 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 review 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, on 9282 5918

‘And when we heard the wireless news  
When portly Winston gave his views  
“The RAF” he said “in Greece  
Is fighting hard to bring us peace”  
And so we scratched our heads and thought  
This smells distinctly like a rort  
For if in Greece the Airforce be  
Then where the flaming hell are we?’

## ***Opinion – National Security and the Energy Transition***

**Mike Rawlinson**

Opinion in the March 2023 Issue addressed Defence and the Energy Transition. This article revisits the topic with emphasis on the complications, contradictions and irrationality inherent in the situation Australia finds itself. First some background on China and the United States in the Indo-Pacific.

### **China and Australia**

Early this century (C21) strategists were recognising the emergence of China as a great power and likely confrontation between China and the US for hegemony in the Asia/Pacific region. China achieved an amazing economic growth rate. 10% throughout the 1990s, and was and is Australia's predominant customer for iron ore, coal, and liquid natural gas. Via globalization China became the workshop of the world. China and Australia have complementary economies. Australia has had to balance its trade interests with China with its US relationship which is based on shared democratic values and the ANZUS Treaty.

China, Australia's trading partner has become a great power. It has a population of 1.4 billion, recently passed by India, and the largest world economy. However, it does have some economic problems - massive debt, and real estate over-investment resulting in deflation. It also has an ageing and declining population, exacerbated by the former one-child policy. Other problems are air, water and soil pollution, food and energy security.

Many in the west hoped that China's success within the capitalist-based system of world trade would lead to some political liberalisation, but this has not eventuated. China has strengthened its authoritarian communist regime and has engaged in the full range of grey zone activities. China has built a modern military as befits a great power. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) is the army of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) not the Chinese state, and the PLA Navy is now the largest in the world although not the most powerful. China has had an aggressive stance towards its neighbours, militarised the South China Sea, and supported Russia. At home it has crushed the democracy movement in Hong Kong, maintained a totalitarian domestic regime of surveillance, censorship and human rights abuse. It has had a bullying posture towards Australia but has shown that it can change from nice to nasty to nice.

As predicted China is challenging the US to become the regional hegemon. A likely cause for conflict between China and the US concerns Taiwan. China claims sovereignty over Taiwan and indicates it might pursue it by military means. While the US does not have a

defence treaty with Taiwan, it has made a political commitment to support Taiwan in the event of Chinese aggression.

Reflecting China's aggressive bullying and unjustified trade sanctions against Australia, the 2020 Strategic Update concluded that the warning time for conflict had shortened to less than 10 years and recognised that conflict over Taiwan should not be discounted. China, still Australia's major trading partner, was in competition with the US Australia's long-time ally and nuclear protector. The Biden administration was redeploying forces in the Indo-Pacific region with more US forces likely to be based in Northern Australia. In September 2021 the AUKUS alliance was announced and provided for Australia's acquisition of nuclear-powered submarines, missiles, and cooperation on new military technology.

Australia's Defence Strategic Review (DSR) looked at the ADF's force posture, structure and capabilities. In 2023 it recommended that the ADF change from a balanced force to a focussed force capable of independent power projection and deterrence. It stressed the urgency of making this change. In 2024 following a Surface Fleet Review the government endorsed doubling the size and lethality of the surface fleet to 26 major surface combatants including 6 optionally crewed arsenal ships. A downside of AUKUS is that it has bound Australia even closer to the US. This may result in an effective loss of sovereignty should the US and China enter a military conflict over Taiwan. From a different perspective, a greater US military presence provides cover for the at least 10-year capability gap resulting from delays in replacement of the RAN's sub-surface and surface fleets. However, should a Trump presidency result in US isolationism, all bets are off.

The fact remains, China is the source of both Australia's prosperity and its insecurity.

### **The Energy Transition**

By the Paris Climate Summit agreement of 2015 nations committed to hold any temperature increase to 1.5c above pre-industrial levels. Following Anthropogenic Global Warming (AGW) theory, temperature increase is due to human sourced carbon dioxide emissions. A major source of these emissions is from coal fired power stations. The energy transition involves replacing fossil fuel powered generation with renewables: solar, wind and hydro. Nuclear is also a zero-emission non-renewable option. Australia is potentially well placed to do this, having large desert and semi desert areas available for solar farms, a long windy coastline and significant uranium reserves.

### **China**

China is the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide (30%) and is increasing its emissions by building more coal fired power stations. While paying lip service to the Net Zero target China and India are seen by the UN

as developing countries and not subject to the Paris agreement. China is developing all forms of electricity generation: coal, gas, nuclear, solar, wind and hydro. As well as constructing additional new coal powered generators, it is replacing old particulate polluting power plants with new High Efficiency Low Emission (HELE) power stations.

China is a major beneficiary of the UN's AGW campaigns. As the workshop of the world, it has become the world's largest producer of solar cells and wind turbines. While solar cells were invented at the University of NSW, over 90% of solar cell/panels sold in Australia are manufactured in China and have a reputation for quality and value.

China has also become the world's largest manufacturer of Electric Vehicles. Not only are Chinese brands manufactured in factories in China, but also Tesla and European Brands. Tesla has six giga factories around the world including one in Shanghai. Most EVs sold in Australia were made in China. Along with the vehicles, China has become the world's largest manufacturer of lithium batteries. In the energy transition grid scale batteries are needed for the short-term stabilization of intermittent power from solar and wind renewables.

Nuclear power plants have been maintained in China, new ones built, and more are under construction or planned. From 6-8 new plants are commissioned every year.

## **Australia**

By the Glasgow Earth Summit (COP26) in 2021 Australia signed up to achieve Net Zero emissions by 2050. Although Australia is only responsible for 1.4% of world carbon dioxide emissions, and total elimination of Australia's emissions will not have a perceptible effect on global warming, the government has fully embraced UN carbon reduction targets. Australia has legislated economy wide greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets of a 43% reduction from 2005 levels by 2030 and net zero by 2050. Australia has already the world's foremost take-up of rooftop solar. The bulk of the reductions are to be achieved by replacing fossil fuel power stations by electricity generated by renewables - wind and solar. These sources are intermittent and require back-up by batteries, pumped hydro, gas or other means. However, batteries and pumped hydro alone are incapable of providing dispatchable power during a prolonged 'wind drought' or solar interruption by cloud, smoke or volcanic ash. Such events have occurred overseas, and back-up has been provided by coal, gas and nuclear. What is required is a smooth transition from fossil fuels to low emission power.

By the government's 'Rewiring the Nation' initiative, the Australian electricity grid will be transformed to incorporate power produced by diverse new wind and solar sites. The program includes connections to Snowy 2.0 and the undersea Marinus Link connecting Victoria to Tasmania's hydro and wind power generators. A downside is the huge cost and environmental destruction involved. When complete the expanded

network will also contribute to the robustness of the system by connecting consumers to sources experiencing different weather conditions. Snowy 2 pumped hydro is currently subject to cost blowouts and delays.

Current government policy excludes nuclear reactors and prospective interest in Small Modular Reactors. Also new gas exploration and investment in new coal mines is to be restrictively regulated, and there is to be no investment in High Efficiency Low Emissions (HELE) coal fired power stations. For a prosperous economy with a resurgent manufacturing industry, energy must be secure, reliable, and affordable. To date, the contrived urgency of the transition from fossil fuel has the potential to damage the economy and threaten the future security of the nation.

Energy Security is National Security. A strong military needs a strong economy. The closure of coal stations needs to be delayed until secure and reliable power assured, with gas as an enabler to complement wind and solar, and with nuclear competing on its merits in providing base load power.

Australia needs increased productivity which in turn needs increased investment. Mitigating factors are energy, which is expensive, insecure and unreliable. There is also sovereign risk associated with unknown restrictions, regulations and taxes that may be imposed associated with achieving net zero.

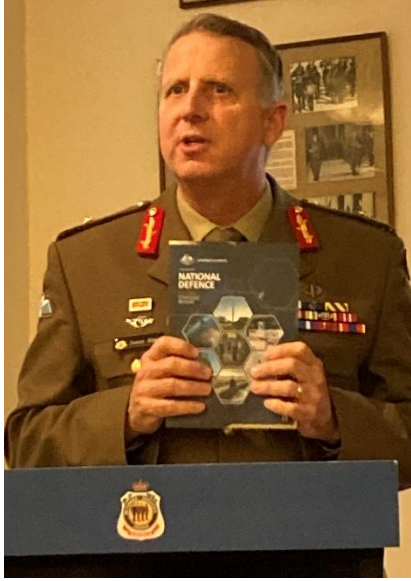
While China is the source of Australia's insecurity, Australia has an unhealthy dependence on China for the sustainment of its energy system. Solar panels and wind turbines require replacement after 10-15 years and lithium batteries have useful lives of 5-15 years. While other overseas sources are available, for items so fundamental to energy security, national security requires the development of an onshore manufacturing capability.

Australia is a country that is living beyond its means. Everything is not OK. There is cyclical underfunding of departments and agencies, deferral of maintenance and replacement and overlooking of non-pressing items. One national security item consistently overlooked is the provision of 90 days onshore liquid fuel reserves. Governments from both sides of politics have been able to fudge this big-ticket item as it will involve building new oil refineries and storage.

As well as Australia's economic dependence on China as an export customer, because of its dependence on China for solar panels, wind turbines and batteries, national security is linked to the energy transition. National security requires that Australia has an onshore capability for the manufacture of renewable consumables.

In resource allocation national security presents short-term risks and needs to have demonstrable higher priority than the current focus on the long-term energy transition target of Net Zero by 2050.

**MAJGEN Jason Blain DSC, AM, CSC**  
**Lunchtime Address**  
**Thursday 29 February**  
**Army's Response to the Defence Strategic Review**



Major General Jason Blain DSC, AM, CSC gave the first Lunch Time Address in the 2004 program, representing the Chief of Army. His topic was the 'Australian Army's response to the Defence Strategic Review'.

General Blain first spoke about 'strategic' issues such as the Army's Mission and Purpose. Responding to the DSR was the priority at this time, but he emphasized the Army was also responding to other Commissions and Inquiries viz the inquiry into war crimes in Afghanistan, and the incidence of suicide among ex and returning service personnel. National strategy, focus, force posture and structure, and the logistics of the ADF were all under review and were an essential part of the on-going political process. He stressed that the Army no longer has the luxury of time

Referring to the Chief of Army's priorities. General Blain said 'trust' should be seen as a key concept in all situations. Plus, the importance of telling the story of what the Army actually does was also very important.

'Tactical' issues included the increasing use of drones, the situation in Ukraine, cultural training within the Army, the new interest in littoral maneuvering, the reduction of the Redback IFV fleet from 450 to 129, and the decision to select a different type of helicopter.

In conclusion, there was a sense of optimism within the Army brought on by: (i) the acquisition of a new IFV; (jj) acquiring new and upgraded tanks; and (iii) Army Aviation getting Apache helicopters.

**Summary by Michael Small**

**A CHRONICLE of**  
**Events, Decisions &**  
**Issues relating to Defence Matters**  
**December 1 2023 – February 29 2024**

**Michael Small**

**December 9-10 2023**

Congress will pass legislation that would bring the AUKUS security pact between US, Australia and UK a step closer, approving the transfer of nuclear-powered submarines to the RAN in the early 2030s.

The US House of Representatives and Senate agreed to remove legal impediments that would have prevented the transfer of submarines and other advanced military technology.

The National Defence Authorisation Act authorises US Navy to sell three conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines to another nation (Australia).

The agreement includes the training of Australian personnel and facilitation of the acceptance of a \$US3bn contribution Australia has undertaken to provide the US to help expand US domestic submarine production.

Beginning in 2032 there will be a transfer of two Virginia-class submarines from the existing US inventory, and a third directly from the production line.

Republican senators had held up efforts in July to operationalise AUKUS, demanding the White House provide additional funding for the US submarine industrial base, which has struggled to meet US navy's needs for additional submarines to compete with China's expanding fleet.

In October, the White House proposed an extra \$US3.4bn to fund US submarine production, funding that remains held up by a fight between Republicans and Democrats over aid to Israel and Ukraine, and reforms to security on the southern border.

The 3000-plus-page NDAA, which will provide \$US886bn for US defence forces, is expected to pass both chambers next week before being sent to the White House for President Biden to sign.

Passage of the bill will leave any element of the AUKUS deal vulnerable only to adverse political decisions by any future leader in the US, UK or Australia.

**December 12 2023**

A future US president will have to certify that the transfer of nuclear submarines to Australia will not undermine America's military capabilities or foreign policy, under draft legislation that offers multiple get-out clauses for any "will not degrade the United States undersea capabilities" and is "consistent with US foreign policy and national security interests".

The sale would also be conditional on the US "making sufficient submarine production and maintenance investments" to meet its own needs, and on Australia having the capability to operate the vessels.

The legislation agreed by Congress, Senate and House armed services committees – which is due to pass in coming days – would make the sale of three Virginia class submarines to Australia contingent on guarantees provided by the President "not later than 290 days" before the transfer.

The legislation comes despite the government's assurances that Australia would have sovereign control over US supplied boats, and fears among AUKUS critics that the deal could draw the nation into a future US war with China over Taiwan.

Under the terms of the AUKUS pact, Australia is due to receive the first of three to five AUKUS submarines from 2032. But there have been bipartisan concerns in the US that the country's submarine manufacturing capability is lagging behind where it would need to be to supply any nuclear-powered boats to Australia.

### **December 14 2023**

The US has been approaching allies this week to contribute to an expanded international naval task force in response to Yemen's Iran sponsored Houthi rebels launching a barrage of missile and drone attacks targeting Israel, US Navy ships and commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

The attacks, including one on a Norwegian flagged tanker off Yemen, threaten global shipping transiting the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. The attacks increase the chances of a direct military clash between US Navy, and the Iran-backed rebels, which would escalate tensions between Washington and Tehran.

US Navy-led Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) have requested that Australia send a warship as part of a larger naval task force to focus on protecting shipping transiting the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

### **December 16 2023**

Rear Admiral Smith said the RAN is ready to send a warship to the Middle East if the government agrees to an American request. Rear Admiral Smith said the navy was "ready to support any requirements that the government will ask of us", despite concerns over the availability of the Anzac-class frigates for the proposed Red Sea deployment. Instead, eleven ADF officers have joined the Netherlands, Bahrain, and Canada to assist US and UK airstrikes on Houthi anti-ship missile capabilities in Yemen. Germany, Italy, France and Spain have all sent warships to protect their shipping interests independently of US and UK.

Foreign Minister Senator Penny Wong arrived in the Middle East as ADF personnel take a direct role for the first time in the recent conflict

PM Albanese praised the passage of the AUKUS-enabling bill on Friday morning, and said he had spoken to more than 100 members of Congress to help get the bill across the line

Defence Minister Marles said the passage of the bill was important for the AUKUS partnership. "We are on the precipice of historic reform that will transform our ability to deter, innovate and operate together".

US legislation allows: (i) the sale of three Virginia-class nuclear submarines to Australia; (ii) authorises maintenance work on US submarines in Australia; and (iii) enables Australian workers to be trained in US shipyards.

It comes amid workforce shortages that have taken one Anzac frigate out of the water indefinitely and left sufficient crew to put only three of the remaining eight frigates to sea at once.

There has been an increasing number of missile and drone attacks on ships in the Red Sea, including a Norwegian tanker. Houthi fighters are increasing their harassment in this area in protest against Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza.

Australia is the only AUKUS member not to send a ship to help protect shipping in the Red Sea. Britain announced it would send HMS *Diamond* to support the multinational naval presence.

HMS *Diamond* will join a French frigate and two US destroyers. The US ships have shot down drones and missiles fired by Houthi rebels at commercial ships.

Australia is scheduled to receive two in-service *Virginia-class* submarines, and one off the production line under the \$368bn AUKUS plan. Australia will have the option to seek Congressional approval for the purchase of up to two more.

### **January 8 2024**

Soldiers from 7RAR will depart Australia tomorrow to train Ukrainian recruits in the UK as part of Operation Kudu – Australia's mission to train the Armed Forces of Ukraine. They will be farewelled at RAAF Edinburgh in Adelaide. The event will feature a Ukrainian Orthodox blessing to be performed by the Chaplain 7RAR, and a religious representative of the local Ukrainian community. This 90-strong *Operation Kudu* contingent (increased from 70 in previous rotations) will be commanded by Major Michael Jack.

### **January 16 2024**

Two more of the RAN's *Anzac-class frigates* will be put on hard stands in Fremantle as crew shortages undermine the nation's military and naval capabilities. Shortages of navy-qualified marine and electrical engineers are acute, with the vessels unable to go to sea without sufficient personnel in the key roles.



The *Hobart-class* air warfare destroyers are also having crewing issues due to a shortage of combat system operators. The workforce shortages have added to the government's reluctance to send a ship to join a US-led operation in the Red Sea to protect international shipping from Iranian-backed Houthis.

RAN's personnel crisis comes as the government prepares to announce the results of a major service fleet review, which is set to cut the Hunter-class frigate program amid concerns it no longer meets the nation's needs. Defence is also preoccupied with the AUKUS submarine program, which will require an increase in naval personnel and a 30-year industrial uplift.

ADF uniformed workforce numbers are more than 3400 under target at the end of the 2022-23 financial year, despite a bipartisan commitment to expand the ADF.

#### **February 4 2024**

Day 709 of Russia's war in Ukraine.

#### **February 19 2024**

A new fleet of smaller warships will form the centrepiece of a restructure of the RAN. The government seeks to rebut claims that it has been slow to respond to the threat posed by China. The long-awaited review of the RAN's surface fleet (to be released Tuesday, February 20, 2024) will retain the \$45bn *Hunter-class* frigate program in Adelaide, but with only six of the anti-submarine ships likely to be ordered rather than the initially planned nine.

In December, the government was unable to agree to a US navy request to send a warship to the Red Sea because no crew or ship was available for deployment at short notice.

The government has examined a range of options to acquire a fleet of corvettes or light patrol frigates between 3,500 and 5,000 tonnes from Spain, Germany, Britain, Japan and South Korea.

The first of the new fleet of smaller ships is likely to be built overseas to accelerate their entry into service, but the rest of the corvette/frigate fleet is likely to be constructed in WA to produce a continuous shipbuilding capacity in that state.

The public version of that report, which was commissioned as part of the DSR, will also be released on Tuesday, February 20, 2024.

#### **February 22 2024**

The Government directed an independent analysis to assess the RAN's surface combatant fleet capability to ensure its size, structure and composition complemented the capabilities of the forthcoming conventionally-armed, nuclear-powered submarines.

The analysis was led by USN Vice Admiral (Ret'd) William Hilarides, assisted by the former Secretary of the Australian Department of Finance, Rosemary Huxtable,

and former Commander Australian Fleet Vice Admiral Stuart Mayer

The analysis included an assessment of capability requirements, cost, workforce, schedule, risk and continuous Australian naval shipbuilding. It concurred with the DSR's findings that the current and planned surface combatant fleet is inappropriate for the strategic environment, noting it is the oldest fleet Navy has operated in its history.

The analysis made clear that Australia needs a surface fleet of warships with greater capability in integrated air and missile defence, multi-domain strike and undersea warfare. These are the capabilities needed to support critical activities, including patrolling our northern approaches, close escort and theatre sea lift missions.

The Government supports the direction and key findings set out in this independent analysis.

#### **February 24 2024**

The RAN fleet consists of 11 ships – eight *Anzac-class* frigates and three air warfare destroyers. Their combined strategic weight is minuscule. The government plans to retire one of the Anzacs immediately, and in 2026 retire another. That reduces the fleet to nine ships at a time of maximum strategic challenge. The government will continue the order for Hunter frigates optimised for anti-submarine warfare, but build six instead of nine. The first one arrives in 2034. Many analysts argue the Hunters are under-gunned. The sixth and final Hunter is due in 2043.

Defence Minister Richard Marles said there are "issues of culture within the senior leadership" of his own department that need to be challenged, as he expressed concern about the accuracy and timeliness of advice.

The Minister said that he was frustrated with his department and that he had demanded a culture of excellence. Cultural issues were discussed last year with defence secretary Greg Moriarty and Chief of the Defence Force General Angus Campbell.

The Minister acknowledged problems within the "broader leadership". "What we need to see in terms of the leadership of the ADF and the Department of Defence – and I'm not just talking about the two leaders (Mr Moriarty and General Campbell) – but the broader leadership is that all that we do is done with excellence," the Minister said. There is an issue in relation to culture and we should be seeking to have a culture of absolute excellence and that is the point that I've made."

The comments from the Minister come after the government announced plans to increase the RAN's surface fleet to 26 major combatants through the procurement of a new class of 11 frigates and six large drone-style "optionally crewed" vessels.

*Continued page 21*

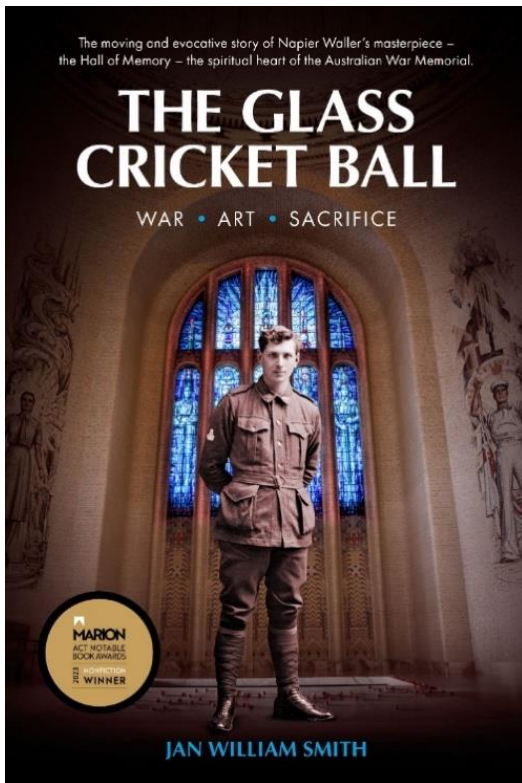
## Book Reviews

This newsletter has 13 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 Glass Cricket Ball*

War • Art • Sacrifice



#### Jan William Smith

Newport, NSW: Big Sky Publishing, 2022  
Paperback 250pp RRP:\$29.99

Reviewer: Robert Dixon, February 2024

The title of this book is a reference to the Hall of Memory in the Australian War Memorial where there are three stained-glass windows, each of which is divided into five tall panels.

The fifteen panels each features a figure from different branches of the military in the uniforms of the First World War, surrounded by their equipment and other items meant to illustrate the social, personal and fighting qualities of Australian service men and women. One of the windows includes a cricket ball and stumps, symbolising sporting activity. All fifteen windows are the work of the one-armed Australian artist Napier Waller (1893 – 1972).

The *Glass Cricket Ball* is the story of Waller's life, the creation of the artworks in the Hall of Memory and the bringing home and re-burial in 1993 of the remains of an Unknown Australian Soldier from the military cemetery at Villers-Bretonneux. Waller himself served as a bombardier in France and it was there, at Bullecourt in 1917, that he lost his arm.

The story is well told but the *List of Contents* is rather unusual. It records eighteen chapters, but while each chapter number is listed on the page no title is given for any of the chapters!

The author gives a first-hand account of interviews and places visited and also of 'imagined' scenes involving Waller and others. Rather than 'off-putting' I found that this style very engaging as it can tend to 'draw the reader in'. I find this stimulates the imagination and results in the reader feeling that they are accompanying the author on his journey. The author is very good at describing things and as a result the text is very evocative of people, rooms in a house, towns and geographic features amongst other things. I enjoyed reading this book and I would recommend it to anyone who is interested in the life and work of Napier Waller and especially in his glass panels and mosaics in the Hall of Memory at the AWM. I notice that the book won the ACT Notable Book Award for non-fiction in 2023.

The work is 232 pages long but the font is very-reader friendly with only around 200 words per page. As a result it can be read in one or two sittings. There is no index but there are 18 pages of very useful notes. The book contains 16 photographs of which 11 are B&W. The first photograph is quite striking, it shows Napier Waller in his uniform prior to embarkation for the Western Front set in a garden (in the photographer's studio). It is impossible to view the photo and not be mindful of the utter horror which was soon to take the place of this idyllic background. Most of the other B&W photos are from the sketchbook he carried with him during the war.

Strangely, given the amount of the text devoted to the stained-glass windows in the Hall of Memory, the book includes photographs of only two of the windows, both in colour. Unfortunately, there is a mistake in the labelling of one of the photographs. The captions tell the reader that both of the photographs are of the west window, but this is not the case. The upper photo (both photos are on the same page) is of the *south* window not the west window. It is the bottom photo on the page which is of the west window (this one is correctly labelled). Finally, the book does not contain any photos of the east window which, again given the focus of the book (and given also that this is the only window that shows a wounded soldier), is rather puzzling.

## ***The Echidna Strategy***

*Australia's Search for Power and Peace*

**Sam Roggeveen**

Collingwood, VIC: Black Inc Books, 2023  
Paperback 240pp RRP: \$32.99

Reviewer: Robert Ellis, January 2024

During the earlier part of the 21st Century, the then-Australian Government commenced a major planning exercise to review and revise plans for Australia's defence in the event of war.

# THE ECHIDNA STRATEGY

*Australia's Search for Power and Peace*

'Essential reading for anyone interested in our nation's security in an uncertain world, where the enduring supremacy of the United States cannot be assumed or assured.'  
**MALCOLM TURNBULL**



**SAM ROGGEVEEN**

After extensive negotiations, it was agreed that a flotilla of diesel-powered submarines should be ordered from a French shipyard, to replace the six diesel-powered Collins Class submarines then in service with the Royal Australian Navy. After work was started on the first hull, the Government decided to cancel the agreement. After further negotiations with British and American senior military and political leaders, it was decided to order up to eight nuclear-powered attack submarines, as a key element in Australia's future defence commitments and structure, under the AUKUS agreement. This major decision was to further integrate Australian defence capability with that of the United States of America, which had become Australia's major ally and was already a supplier of combat aircraft, heavy-lift military freight and transport fixed-wing and helicopter aircraft and American-pattern armoured fighting vehicles.

Reliance on the United States as a significant supplier of military hardware, and as a key source of support in the event of any future war, has been central to Australia's defence planning since 1942, when, after the fall of Singapore (Britain's major base in eastern Asia and the Pacific Ocean basin), it became glaringly obvious to the then Government, and its leader, Prime Minister John Curtin, that Great Britain was not then

able to make any significant contribution to Australia's defence against Japanese military expansionism in the region. Australia would only survive with American assistance, in men and equipment.

From the start of the Napoleonic Wars in 1804 to the beginning of the First World War in 1914, sea-borne trade, upon which much of the world depended for imports of food and other resources and the export of manufactured and processed products, was carried on under the protection of Britain's Royal Navy - then the largest and most effective naval force in the world. Through this 'Pax Britannica' Britain fulfilled its obligation to the rest of the world to protect sea trade. This was central to its world view and its national security. After 1945, when the United States was, to some extent the 'last man standing', it took on this role of international political leader and moderator, that Britain had held from 1804 to 1914. Many other components of what the British Empire had been, became responsible for their own defence, and Australia was one which turned to the United States for leadership and support in international affairs.

Central to its Government's thinking, in the early 21st Century, was the somewhat radical decision to for Australia to 'go nuclear', with six to eight submarines - initially two to four - purchased from the US or Britain, and the remainder built in Australia, as the key element in a policy of deterrence.

In his book, Mr Roggeveen criticizes this strategy as inappropriate, and suggests, as one alternative, adopting an 'Echidna Strategy'. Being small animals, the echidna is often preyed on by larger predators. Its only defence is its sharp-pointed and rigid quills, like those grown by porcupines. When it is curled up in a ball, with a 360° barrier, the predator is faced with this almost impenetrable hedge, which will inflict more harm on the hunter than any benefit gained by attacking. So, the echidna lives on, while the hunter goes hungry or finds some less well-protected quarry.

Australia's geographic location poses an additional barrier to any likely aggressor. It is relevant that in 1942, the Japanese did not make any determined attempt to land troops on the Australian continent. The Japanese Army believed that it would need to land seven divisions, which, with Headquarters and Corps troops, would mean somewhere around 100,000 to 120,000 men, with heavy equipment and transport vehicles. The Imperial Japanese Navy stated it could not guarantee logistic support for more than two divisions, which might have been enough to defeat the Australian forces in country at the time, but nowhere enough to hold what they had taken, so no attempt was made to invade. [This is discussed in detail in Craig Collie's excellent book *On Our Doorstep*, which is well worth reading, as it sets out the problems facing an invader then - and which would still be a serious handicap for any potential attacker in the mid-21st Century].

### **Echidna Strategy** (*continued*)

Mr Roggeveen suggests other strategies should the United States not be able to prevent an aggressive approach to Australia. It is pertinent that this book was published in 2023, and this implies that much of the research involved was undertaken between 2019 and 2022, and that there have been significant changes in the political and economic environment since.

Only marginal attention is paid to the possible return to the Presidency of the U.S. by Donald Trump, should he win power in November 2024. If that occurs, there may be a reversion to the isolationist policies that kept the United States standing back from involvement in international affairs from the 'Roaring Twenties' to the late nineteen thirties. It became involved, only reluctantly in 1941, in the European-centred World War in 1941-42, and then only after a direct attack by Japan on the US navy base at Pearl Harbour and Nazi Germany's declaration of war against the United States in December 1941. Many American political and military leaders would have been prepared to concentrate their efforts on war with Japan in the Pacific theatre, leaving Britain and the USSR to deal with Hitler's Germany without American aid.

There are other strategic structures, suggested by the author, which may serve to deter any attempt by a foreign power to invade and occupy Australia. One is to create, across the Pacific Ocean, something similar to the European Union, but led by Australia, alone or in concert with New Zealand, to present a united front to the People's Republic of China (PRC), should the United States lose or voluntarily abandon its role of socio-political leader. There are two bars to adopting this strategy: It may be seen to smack of colonialism, and so be unacceptable to some of the smaller nations, and this strategy is weak, in that even if all the smaller Pacific nations did come together, under joint Australian and New Zealand leadership, they would not have the strength to confront the sheer mass of the PRC. Put simply: 'It's a great idea, but . . .'

Another option Roggeveen puts forward is to find a third power, not already committed to a role of leadership, to take over that role from the United States. He suggests this could be either India or Indonesia. Both these countries have large and rapidly increasing populations - India, with more than 1.6 billion people, is larger than the PRC; Indonesia, with about 290 million people, is smaller, but still a large country. Indonesia is resource-rich; India is largely rural. They have similar demographic structures - mostly young people, with a small number of very rich, a slow-growing middle class, and a large number at low-income or subsistence-levels, especially in rural areas, where in both countries there is much endemic poverty. India, overall, has a higher standard of education than does Indonesia, and a more skilled work force, but neither country has a single common language - India has more than 300 distinct languages or major dialects; Indonesia claims nearly twice this number. Neither is politically stable, and both have strongly defined and sometimes incompatible religions.

Militarily, neither is powerful, although India, which has a small number of atomic warheads, has a significant naval force and a reasonably modern air service. Its land forces did not perform well in two wars against its neighbour, Pakistan, or in smaller border wars with China. It is also dependent, in part, on mercenary Nepalese for a substantial part of its infantry. Indonesia has a small Navy, largely of small patrol vessels, few modern aircraft and an army which is not well mechanised. Many middle- and senior-level officers are political appointees and lack leadership skills and experience.

It seems unlikely that either country could fill any leadership role left vacant by an American withdrawal from this role in the Pacific Basin, and India has no great stake in the area. It might be 20 to 30 years before India could realistically be expected to take on the international leadership role that the US now holds. For Indonesia, it may take 40 to 50 years to reach that stage. Australia cannot risk waiting that long.

The only other likely contender to Pacific Ocean leadership seems to be Japan, which receives only passing mention in this context by the author. It has a large, but aging population, and it has difficulty recruiting replacements for armed forces personnel who are reaching retiring age. It has an industrialised economy and a highly skilled workforce. Its military is strong, well-equipped, and integrated with other friendly countries, but its doctrines are focussed on defence of Japan. It has no love for the Chinese People's Republic or its satellite, North Korea. It is unlikely to voluntarily fill any leadership role vacated by the United States, and there may be other smaller Pacific Ocean powers that have long memories and would not look to Japan for leadership.

Looking back at the broad situation, Australia is not in a good position vis-a-vis the Peoples Republic of China. It is likely that it must, as Mr Roggeveen suggests, rely on a combination of ballistic missiles and static marine mines for defence against invasion, and hope that any potential enemy is unable to solve the problems of logistics posed by Australia's geographic isolation.

Our greatest risk may be if a smaller country, using long-range ballistic missiles, which it may develop in the near future, launches an unprovoked attack on Australia or one of its closer friends, and is backed up by another larger power which may risk a major war to gain some worth-while return at a bearable cost. We will be safer, Roggeveen argues, if the cost of conquering Australia is seen to be greater than the benefits that will be gained.

This is an unlikely future scenario, and it is one in which Australia's best defence strategy will be the land-based or marine-based defences Mr Roggeveen suggests as our first line of defence, linked to the logistic problems and costs involved in maintaining any invasion force.



## ***How They Fought***

*Indigenous Tactics and Weaponry of Australia's  
Frontier Wars*

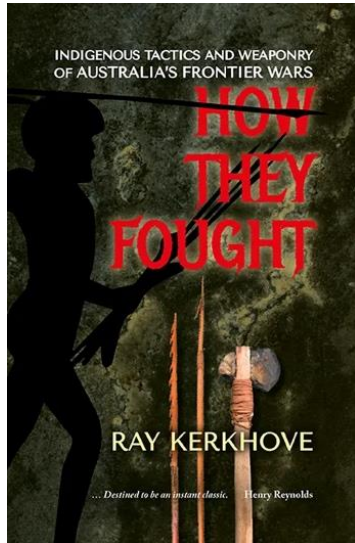
**Ray Kerkhove**

Tingalpa, QLD: Boolarong Press, 2023

Paperback 430pp RRP: \$39.99

Reviewer: Neville Taylor, February 2023

Dr Kerkhove has, with seemingly boundless enthusiasm and energy, explored an incredible number of references, contributed his own photographs, tables and diagrammatic representations of First Nations' tactics in numerous scenarios, and collated all of the former to produce a landmark work for future generations and scholars.



The reader is quickly made aware that this is not an account of indigenous massacres. A table of casualties of major Frontier War incidents dispels any thought that the White Man had it all his own way. Many incidents occurred on individual 'settlements' where the individual settler/family

was massively outnumbered. Numerous large tracts of First Nations' food sources were rendered too great a risk for white settlement for decades. Historian Fergus Robinson 'estimated that the rivers in and around Sydney were not under European control until the 1820s.' There were 131 white deaths suffered during boat attacks in north Queensland.

The work consists of six chapters on typical engagements, organisation, command and control, strategies, weaponry and defences. Confrontations described are not limited to those against the newly-arrived white man but include inter-tribal clashes. In every aspect the First Nations' people were 'a lot smarter' than credited by the white 'invaders' and were quick to adapt to new situations and develop tactics to thwart the expansion of white settlement. The 'recycling' of beer bottles saw the glass used as tools for fashioning spear shafts in greatly reduced time.

This is an enlightening, extremely well-documented treatise on our First Nations people. With over 70 pages of *Endnotes*, 50-odd pages of *Consulted Works* and an excellent *Index*, here is an obvious starting point for any scholar from primary school to university to broaden their knowledge of First Nations people during the two centuries of Australian colonisation.

## ***Shattered Lives***

*A brutal murder, a cop on edge*

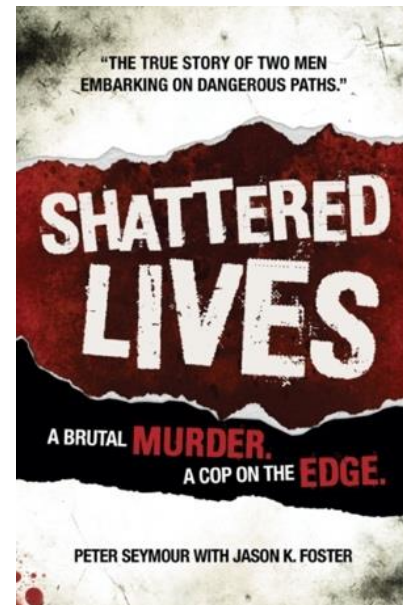
**Peter Seymour and Jason K Foster**

Newport, NSW: Big Sky Publishing, 2023

Paperback 280pp RRP: \$32.99

Reviewer: Neville Taylor, January 2024

Detective Peter Seymour had spent years in Homicide before moving into the NSW Coroner's Court. After eight years there, the images he has previously exposed to over the years and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) manifests itself as images involving his own children.



Deciding to leave the Coroner's Court, he goes back to normal policing. Unfortunately, his first major investigation is one involving a thoughtless cowardly attack that leaves the victim dead, and his demons continue to pursue him. This autobiography reveals the strategies of his coping with mixed success in living with his PTSD. He has promised the victim's wife that he will bring the culprits to pay for their crime, and with a paucity of clues available to track down the killers, the work pressure grows even further.

Once the culprits have been found, there exists the problem and pressure of accumulating sufficient evidence to enable a conviction. One of the assailants is jailed, the other goes to court where he is found not guilty. This is all too much for Seymour and he ultimately resigns from the NSW Police Force.

An interesting account of the manifestation of PTSD and the way the sufferer continued to work in a diminishingly safe environment despite all the support from his superiors, colleagues and family.

## ***He Belonged to Wagga***

*The Great War, the AIF and returned soldiers in an Australian country town*

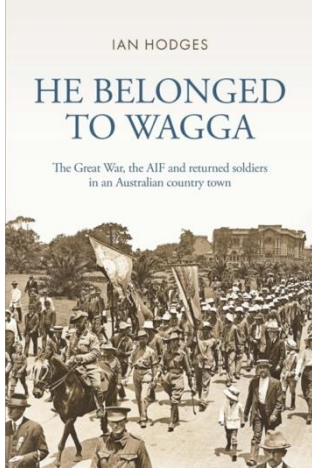
**Ian Hodges**

North Melbourne, VIC: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2022

Paperback 330pp RRP: \$44:00

Reviewer: Adrian Catt, February 2024

Pride. Mateship. Determination. These are the qualities which make Australians. Though they may seem lacking in this nation at present, the people of Wagga in the early days of Federation had it in spades; an *esprit de corps* which, if regained, would make this Nation great again.



This is a quaint, but very important historical account of how a regional country town, and indeed an entire district, was awakened by visionaries, leaders and believers and drawn into a

World War out of heartfelt allegiance to Empire, Peace, and community. An uplifting book that examines the people, government and organisations which worked from colonial times into early Commonwealth in order to support the War effort, for those in Service as well as those left behind; right through to declaration of Peace, repatriation, social expansion, and the resultant hardships of continued misery inflicted by the arrival of the Great Depression.

Author Ian Hodges tells the story of key individuals of the Wagga district, whether they be politicians, aristocrats, farmers, professionals or labourers, and follows how both their lives and community matured during these difficult and troubled times. Hodges uncovers the pride, co-operation, and successes of Wagga, as well as the rogues, failures, disagreements and fallouts of the largest regional town in New South Wales at that time.

Division, however, was no barrier to supplying, supporting and recovering from the Great War for the Wagga district, as the results ultimately achieved always succeeded in supporting Soldiers, Families, and the wider community.

Each chapter reveals struggles, decisions, initiatives and policies which delivered positive outcomes, (such as the formation of ex-service organisations, Legacy, the rejection of conscription, and the establishment of pensions). Thoughtful summaries are provided too, and the book ends on a balanced note in a delightfully concise conclusion. The *End Notes* are impressively extensive.

Great reading which is very informative of the impact of the Great War and Great Depression upon the microcosm case in point: Wagga. Thoroughly enjoyed – Highly recommended.

## ***The Factory***

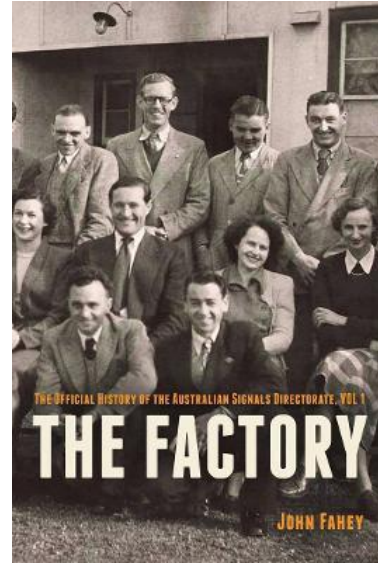
*The Official History of the Australian Signals Directorate, Vol I*

**John Fahey**

Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2022

Hardback 576pp RRP: \$79.50

Reviewer: Daniel Gluer, December 2023



Imagine a hidden wartime hero, not wielding a gun, but cracking codes – their battlefield, the airwaves buzzing with enemy secrets. This is the captivating story of the Australian Signals Directorate (ASD) revealed by John Fahey.

During World War II, when danger lurked in coded messages, the ASD's codebreakers were Australia's secret weapon. Like skilled linguists deciphering ancient scrolls, they unravelled enemy plans, preventing surprise attacks and safeguarding the nation. But unlike wartime heroes fading into history, the ASD's mission continued, evolving into a watchful guardian during the Cold War.

Think of them as silent sentinels, using cutting-edge technology like high-tech owls, to listen in on conversations between potentially unfriendly nations. It was like catching murmurs across vast distances, not juicy gossip, but crucial intel about possible threats to Australia's security.

Adaptability was their watchword. From wartime ciphers to Cold War satellites, the ASD transformed its methods like a chameleon, constantly outsmarting new threats and adopting innovative techniques. Even during the complexities of the Vietnam War, they adjusted their focus, proving their unwavering commitment to national security.

Through it all, the ASD has stood as a silent guardian angel, shielding Australia from harm. This book opens a door to their clandestine world, introducing the real people who make up this remarkable team and showcasing their dedication to keeping the country safe. It's a testament to human ingenuity, unwavering courage, and the power of secrets kept for the greater good.

## **1942: The Year the War came to Australia**

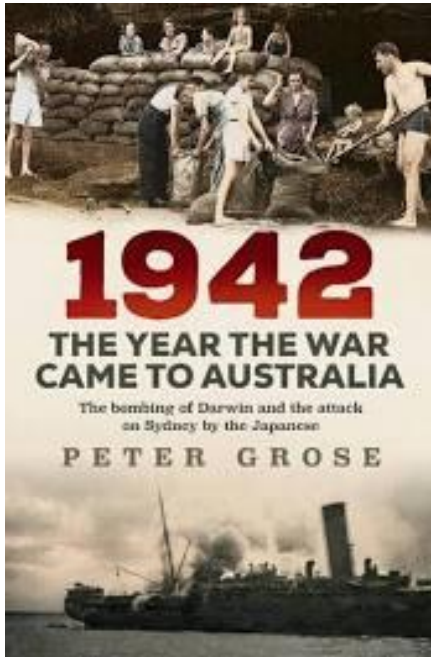
*The bombing of Darwin and the attack on Sydney by the Japanese*

**Peter Grose**

Allen & Unwin, 2021

Paperback 592pp RRP: \$34.99

Reviewer: Robert Ellis, January 2024



This is an 'Omnibus Volume', published in 2021, and comprising two books, by the same author, printed as a single volume: ***An Awkward Truth*** (2007) and ***A Rude Awakening*** (2009).

**BOOK 1: *AN AWKWARD TRUTH*** covers the first Japanese air attack on Darwin, on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1942, in some detail, with coverage of other air-raids on Broome, Geraldton, Townsville and a few other points seen to have some strategic or tactical value. The Japanese deployed the same aircraft carriers and Naval Air Service aircraft to attack Darwin as had been used for the surprise attack on US naval vessels and facilities at Pearl Harbour on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1941, but achieved less, for there were fewer major targets in and around Darwin than there were at Hawaii.

There were also, throughout 1942, several attacks on Darwin, the airfields around it, and at least twelve other towns, ports, and air bases, and at least two ships. Casualties were severe – over 300 died in Darwin raids alone, but after the first raid, on 7<sup>th</sup> February, damage was minimal.

The defensive facilities in and around Darwin were manned by a handful of Australian Army defence

personnel, with one battery of heavy 3.7-inch anti-aircraft guns, a handful of semi-obsolete 'Lewis' light machine-guns, and twelve lightly-armed 'Wirraway' training aircraft, none of which, when deployed as 'fighters', survived beyond the second or third raid. The only other air defence available for the first attack were US Army P-40 Kittyhawk fighters. These, flying in from Townsville, arrived at Darwin about the same time as the Japanese raiders, but were short of fuel and flown by tired, inexperienced pilots, with very limited training. Nine of the ten American aircraft were destroyed, but the pilot of the one survivor claimed two Japanese shot down.

Darwin had no defensive aircraft to face subsequent raids until the American Army Air Service was able to bring in a handful of Kittyhawks. In 1942 Australia had no fighter aircraft except for a handful of obsolete Hawker 'Demon' two-seater biplanes, which were completely inadequate to deal with even the slowest and least manoeuvrable Japanese aircraft, so for a short time the port and its installations were effectively defenceless.

Peter Grose goes on to describe many the other Japanese air raids on Australian ports and airfields, and the failures by both military and civil leaders to deal with a situation which should have been foreseen, but which drew only apathetic responses from ill-prepared Australian and Northern Territory Governments, the local police and the few Australian troops and airmen then stationed in and around Darwin.

Aubrey Abbott, the Northern Territory Administrator, rightly attracts serious criticism for his failure to perform any of the duties expected of the most senior public servant for the Territory, a position to which he had been appointed by the Menzies-led Federal Liberal Government and for which he had very little appropriate experience or qualification. Much the same can be said of several other public servants and local officials, who shared their shortcomings with both their superiors and colleagues in Canberra, and with senior Armed Forces officers both stationed at the time in Darwin or in other postings round Australia. Those who acted with both efficiency and bravery in a most dangerous and unnerving situation, did well – but they were few, and handicapped by the apathy and inefficiency of their superiors, their co-workers and the 'general public' for whose welfare they should have accepted responsibility. The Commission of Inquiry, chaired by Mr Justice Lowe in March 1942, was scathing about some of the shortcomings of these administrators and Armed Service personnel, and summarises the casualties and damages from the main raid clearly and fully. Justice Lowe's two reports are cited as Appendices to the text, for which they are also a major source of reliable information.

The book is a major contribution to the military history of Australia and is a salutary lesson as to what we might expect if Australia is engaged in a future war with a great power that has the ability and the desire to inflict serious damage on us. I commend the author,



Peter Grose, for his diligent and wide-ranging research and his ability to present a clear record of the attempts by the Japanese to reduce Australia's resistance to their attempts to rule most of the Pacific Ocean's eastern littoral. He does this in a clear and informative way in an easily understood well-constructed narrative.

**BOOK 2: A RUDE AWAKENING** is an account of another incursion into Australia - the Japanese midget submarine attack on Sydney Harbour in May 1942

Unlike the aerial attacks on Darwin, this raid was a 'one off' by the Imperial Japanese Navy on Australia's major port, which was also the site of what was to become a significant naval base later in the war. It was well-planned by the Japanese, using two-man midget submarines carried into action by larger, long-range I-Class submarines, and were probably the only 'secret weapons' which Japan had in 1941-1942.

Peter Grose has researched this operation very thoroughly, and his detailed account holds the reader from beginning to end. The attack inflicted little material damage. The Japanese planning and execution of the raid was as thorough as possible at the time, but the effect was only minimal. Casualties were few, damage was far less than the Japanese hoped for when measured against what might have been achieved had the attackers been a little luckier, or more experienced in using what was, after all, a new weapons system.

The Australian defensive facilities were ineffective, largely through a lack of proper training, inadequate leadership and shortcomings in both equipment and personnel in the set-up of the Australian command and communications networks and the disposition of the defensive 'hardware' around Sydney Harbour. Much more should have been done to ensure that the limited range of defensive equipment was better positioned and manned appropriately, but it had been left to 'someone else' to ensure that gun-positions were manned by fully-trained personnel who knew what to do should there be an attack, but the Japanese were, effectively, almost unopposed.

Mr Grose's narrative also points out that, at the time of the raid, most of the senior Australian and the few senior American naval officers present (from several RAN ships and two US Navy ships replenishing in the port at the time), were at a formal dinner in the home of Rear-Admiral Muirhead Gould, DSC, RN, who had been appointed to the position of Naval Officer in Command, Sydney. This meant that, at a time when leadership was needed, there were inexperienced (and in some cases poorly-trained) junior officers on duty, and unable or unwilling to act without the consent of their seniors who were temporarily unavailable. This factor alone led to slow reaction times, inadequate counter-measures and decision-making - all of which meant that either little was done, or the wrong responses were made to in situations that were outside their experience.

Both books are well-researched and well-written and

provide a detailed coverage of the raids. Although this edition is paper-back, it is well presented, with clear and informative maps, and photographs. Its 573 pages are packed with easily-read, detailed accounts of events which, at the time had a significant impact on Australians who, prior to the raids described, thought that the Second World War was happening 'somewhere else', and that, although over 400,000 Australians were participating in it, in Europe, North Africa and our near North, it was not really something about which we should be concerned. We were shaken out of our complacency, but about 80 years later, many of us have forgotten the lessons that should have been learned in February to May 1942.

There is one criticism of Grose's two books - neither has an index, which means it is difficult to read them as part of a research project. In all other aspects, they are readable, informative, and show clearly the need for properly planned defences manned by well-trained defence personnel, should Australia be likely to be threatened again in the foreseeable future.

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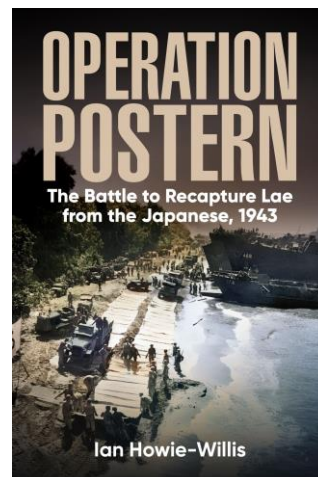
## **OPERATION POSTERN**

*The Battle to Recapture Lae from the Japanese, 1943*

**Ian Howie-Willis**

Sydney, NSW: Big Sky Publishing, 2023  
Paperback 486 pp RRP: \$32.99

Reviewer: David Rees, February 2024



This book is one of the newer campaign history books about a major combat operation by combined Australian & American troops in the South-West Pacific area (SWPA) during WW2. It has been well researched and is a comprehensive war story which makes many references to earlier accounts and views about the campaign. Unlike those stories however, this book includes

observations about the effect of the Pacific war on the indigenous New Guinea & Papuan people. It therefore provides a welcome new dimension in the writing of war campaign histories.

The Australian author spent many years as a teacher in Papua New Guinea and took the opportunity to visit many of the areas where the *Operation Poststern* battles had taken place. However, the book only has four rather small-scale campaign maps to accompany the engaging text. So, perhaps some larger maps and more of them would have been of benefit.

Lae had been occupied by the Japanese since March 1942 and was seen as one of the key ports for use by



the Japanese Army in pushing ahead towards the capture of the whole of Papua New Guinea. However, the Allies had stopped the Japanese advance at Milne Bay in August 1942 and at Kokoda later in 1942. So, it was agreed by the Allied Supreme Commander in the SWPA, General Douglas MacArthur and the Commander in Chief of the Allied Land Forces in the SWPA General Sir Thomas Blamey that the next strategic step was to take the offensive and recapture Lae by September 1943. The book describes in detail some of the meticulous planning undertaken in late 1942 and 1943 to ensure that the task of recapturing Lae was a success. The plans were developed by the SWPA Allied Land Forces in conjunction with the USN, the RAAF and the USAAF 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force. The task was named *Operation Poststern* and the joint planning by the Allies took over ten months. The key Australian parts of the airborne & amphibious plan in summary were: -

1. To bring the Australian 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division troops from North Queensland to Buna and then transport them by USN Task Force 71 landing craft from Buna to two beachheads east of Lae where they would land on 4<sup>th</sup> September and then march and attack the Japanese garrison at Lae from the east.

2. To bring the retrained Australian 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division troops from Queensland to Port Moresby by sea and then fly them via Tsili-Tsili airfield to Nadzab airfield west of Lae on 5<sup>th</sup> September. This involved using the US 503<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment to capture the airfield first before the Division troops were ferried in by air. The Division would then march to Lae following the Markham River and attack the Japanese garrison from the north-west.

3. To use the troops from the Australian 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry Divisions, the Papuan Rifles Regiment, the US 41<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division plus additional units already in New Guinea to continue their attacks towards Lae from the west and south.

The plan worked well and the beach landings were unopposed on land. However, the landing craft were bombed by Japanese aircraft who got through the air cover and resulted in the loss of a few landing craft and men. On 19<sup>th</sup> September 1943, General Sir Thomas Blamey issued a special order to all his land forces stating that *Operation Poststern* was over, and Lae had been recaptured. The battle finally ended on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1943. The victory owed much to the valour, determination and perseverance of the Allied troops, the air forces and US Navy. One historian claimed that *Operation Poststern* was one of the greatest combined airborne and amphibious operations of the Pacific war. At last, Ian Howie-Willis in his book has done *Operation Poststern* justice.

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## **Operation Kingfisher**

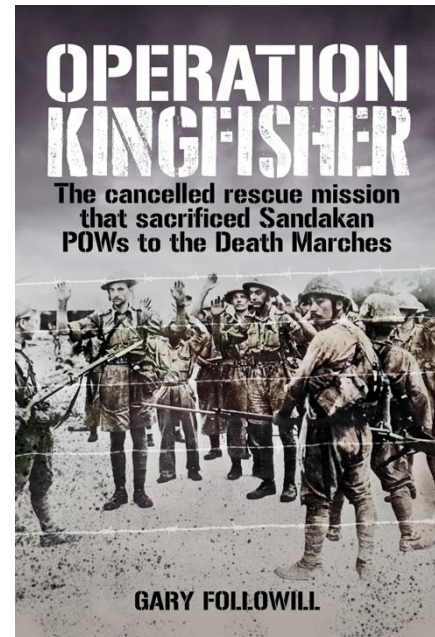
*The cancelled rescue mission that sacrificed Sandakan  
POWs  
to the Death Marches*

**Gary Followill**

Newport, NSW: Big Sky Publishing, 2023  
Paperback 224pp RRP: \$32.99

Reviewer: Neville Taylor, December 2023

*Operation Kingfisher* possessed the ingredients for failure from the moment it was conceptualized.



The reader, knowing the operation was never launched, with each chapter completed is able to compile a list of contributing reasons leading to the ultimate tragic outcome for the 2500 Australian and UK prisoners of war at Sandakan. This was a textbook case of a total lack of collaboration and commitment at every level by those involved.

Prime Minister Robert Menzies was in London appealing Winston Churchill who still regarded colonial forces as 'cannon fodder' for his own grand plans. The fiascos in Singapore, Greece and Crete are testament to Churchill's attitude.

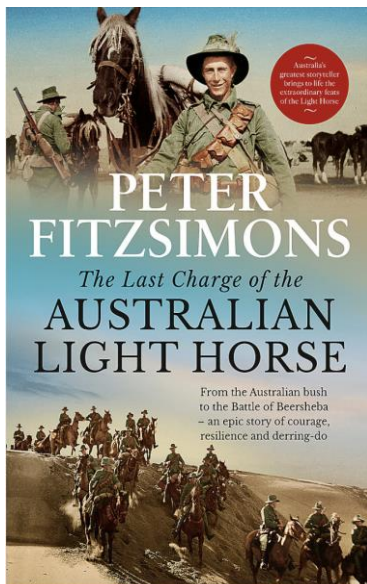
General Douglas MacArthur had already rescued several large numbers of prisoners from deep within the Philippines using both sea and air resources. By the time he became Supreme Commander Southwest Pacific Area Command, he was more interested in his own publicity in the media. He bypassed his own chain of command by only communicating with Prime Minister Curtin and overlooking the Australian command elements in his own area. For the last two years of the War all the credit and glory of victory was going to be claimed by his American troops. General Blamey was someone MacArthur 'tolerated' and any

Australian 'rescue mission' would detract from his own activities.

Blamey was old-fashioned in his military approach, and operations of a clandestine nature he did not wish to know about. British and Australian soldiers had been inserted into Borneo (to prevent the Japanese destroying the valuable oil resources and infrastructure, and to hence enable Britain to repay its immense War debt). The UK Special Operations Executive (SOE) wished to run the joint Borneo operation (*Operation Semut*) that was mainly Special Operations Australia/Special Reconnaissance Department (SRD) service personnel. It reached the stage where the SRD compiled two sets of operation orders – one for the SOE and one for what the SRD intended to do.

Sandakan was being developed by the Japanese as a forward base for its aircraft (the prisoners there being used as labour). The Allies persisted with constant bombing and strafing of the airstrips being constructed, and the Japanese were never going to have two workable runways. While the SRD gained valuable and reliable intelligence through their own eyes and local loyal Dyak warriors, the Australian Headquarters relied on local native 'gossip' to gain a current picture of what was taking place at Sandakan. A patrol was inserted some 200km from the camp and moved away from Sandakan! With air superiority, there was not even an aerial photographic reconnaissance flight planned. The Australian HQ were of the opinion that the Sandakan Camp had been deserted!

While the author does not put any single 'head on a platter', it is plain to see the compounding effect of the attitudes, political agendas, steps taken and the obvious omissions leading to the cancellation of *Operation Kingfisher* becoming another addition to the tragedies of war.



## ***The Last Charge of the Australian Light Horse***

**Peter FitzSimons**

Sydney, NSW: Hachette, 2023

Hardcover 512pp RRP: \$39.99

Reviewer: John Boyce, January 2024

*This* is the latest book by popular author Peter FitzSimons. It is an interesting and engaging narrative aimed at the general reader. It relates the exploits of these exceptional Australian soldiers from the time of their enlistment around Australia, through their training, the blooding on Gallipoli, and then their mounted skirmishes and major battles in the Egyptian desert, Palestine and Syria, including that famous charge at Beersheba in October 1917.

It wasn't actually the last charge of the Desert Campaign, and FitzSimons does acknowledge this. His research team have provided him with much background and sufficient detail to help him create a vibrant and fast-moving tale. The book has much of the narrator's usual dramatic style, even offering a few sound effects of battle but these are (thankfully) muted.

He weaves in quotes from individuals' diaries and letters, plus imagined 're-creations' of conversations long ago in the Middle East. during the Great War. Many of the usual famous incidents and anecdotes are here, including those involving Banjo Paterson, Ion Idriess, 'Galloping Jack' Royston, cricketer Tibby Cotter, pilot Ross Smith, un-ride-able horse *Bill the Bastard*, and Guy Haydon's beloved horse *Midnight*.

It is gratifying to see that FitzSimons' descriptions of the Australian Light Horsemen's exploits are generally accurate, and that in his observations about their leader, General Sir Harry Chauvel, he has captured much of the essence of Sir Harry's astute approach to soldiering. Sir Harry's calm, thoughtful leadership stands out and is repeatedly praised.

It was disappointing to see that FitzSimons succumbed to temptation with the old legend about shooting all the horses left behind at war's end (despite his having cited historian Jean Bou, who has clearly laid that one to rest). Military historians may also struggle with his repeated references to the disastrous accidental 'Valley of Death' charge of the (British) Light Brigade in the Crimean War, such a contrast to the bold, deliberate, all-or-nothing final effort by Australians at Beersheba.

Nevertheless, this is a popular account which deserves a wide audience. It will definitely enhance community understanding of the Australian Light Horse and of their fine leader, General Sir Harry Chauvel.

## ***Where the Flaming Hell Are We?***

*The story of Young Australians and New Zealanders fighting the Nazis in Greece and Crete*

**Craig Collie**

Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2023

Paperback 384pp RRP: \$34.99

Reviewer: Robert Dixon, January 2024

This book covers in much detail the experiences of individual troops in the period from March 1941 when Australian and New Zealand forces were ferried from Egypt to (mainland) Greece all the way through to the evacuation from Crete in May 1941, leaving a large number of troops behind (this occurred after the earlier evacuation from mainland Greece as well as Crete).



This happened despite earlier assurances given in person by Churchill to the Prime Ministers of Australia (Menzies) and New Zealand (Fraser) prior to the commencement of the campaign that, should the expedition fail, all the Australians and New Zealanders, with the possible exception of the wounded, would be evacuated. Clearly this did not happen. The Australian War Memorial estimates that about 39 percent of the Australian troops sent to Greece were either killed, wounded or became prisoners of war by the end of the campaign. Given that context, his book is a very welcome addition to the literature on the ANZACs at war, especially since this campaign has not attracted the attention it deserves.

I enjoyed reading this book, but only after I realised that it is not intended to be a conventional military history. Instead, it is an account of the experience of individual soldiers in Greece and Crete set against a background of the key events of the campaign. To my mind a military history includes, amongst other things, a (critical) discussion of alternative strategies and their costs, the final selection of the strategy to be adopted, the organisation and number of the forces (land sea and air) deemed necessary for success and the role and location of individual units at various stages of the campaign and the outcomes resulting from their actions.

This book does not focus on these topics, for example there is next to no mention of the names of any units apart from the 'Australian Special Wireless Section' (a unit aimed to intercept, locate, and decrypt the radio communications of the enemy). However, while in my view the book is not a military history, it does succeed in bringing the campaign 'to life' and is a marvellous example of what might be called 'social history'.

While most of the book is devoted to first-hand accounts of the ANZACs in Greece and Crete, the author also devotes two chapters to the lives of the troops camped in Egypt prior to their move to Greece and a chapter to the experiences of the troops 'left behind'. There is also a chapter on the responses of senior officers and politicians on the Allied side to the disaster together with a discussion of the impact of the number of German casualties upon Hitler's view of the future use of paratroopers. As we know, after Crete they were mostly used as ground troops.

The choice of title is most interesting. Taken at face value the title might seem to suggest that the troops fighting in Greece and Crete were often unaware of their geographic location, that they were often 'lost'. But that is not what the title is about. The words express the frustration felt by troops who, lacking any air cover, are repeatedly attacked by enemy aircraft who have the skies to themselves. Around half-way through the book it is revealed that the words are taken from a poem titled 'Isle of Doom' written by an Australian infantryman, Private Laurie Ryan who was in Greece at the time and was being constantly bombed and strafed by the Luftwaffe. In the poem Ryan gives us his reaction to a radio broadcast he heard of a speech by Churchill in which 'portly Winston' asserted that the RAF is 'fighting hard' in Greece.

Ryan's brilliant response reads in part:

'And when we heard the wireless news  
When portly Winston gave his views  
"The RAF" he said "in Greece  
Is fighting hard to bring us peace"  
And so we scratched our heads and thought  
This smells distinctly like a rot  
For if in Greece the Airforce be  
Then where the flaming hell are we?'

The book is very detailed and is clearly the result of much thought and considerable research. Although our attention is drawn to the first-hand accounts given by many of the individual troops involved, the extracts from letters and diaries blend in very well with the authors description of the unfolding of the campaign as a whole. That 'blending' is very difficult to achieve yet the author succeeds. It is this, and not the subject matter alone that makes this an outstanding book.

With its focus on the experiences of individual ANZAC soldiers in Greece and Crete, the book makes it very clear how chaotic much of the campaign was and how easily desertion and other behaviours will arise during a withdrawal with the breakdown of communications and discipline. For that reason alone I think this is a book that should be read by anyone who might find themselves leading troops in a battlefield.



I have a few, relatively minor criticisms. Writing about Stukas the author says that ‘Sirens, mounted on the leading edge of [their] wings, produced a piercing scream as the bomber dived ...’ The sirens were not mounted on the leading edge of the wings (although Collie is not alone in asserting that they were), they were mounted on the leading edge of the fairing around the top of the fixed undercarriage legs of the Stuka.

There is a brief mention of war crimes perpetrated by German forces in Crete, but although several sites are mentioned including the massacres at Alikianos (aka Alikianou) and at Kandanos, there is no mention of the massacre at Kondomari which was the first of them and nor is there any mention of the German units involved. Was it just one ‘rogue unit’? Were the massacres carried out by units of the German Army as well as the Paratroopers?

On the back cover of the book is a paragraph about the German invasion of Crete which contains the words ‘As the Nazis assault the island, they deploy a devastating new weapon of invasion-paratroopers-for the very first time ...’ This is a very odd statement. To begin with, the text of the book itself contradicts these words as the author spends several pages discussing the attempts by the Germans to use paratroopers to capture intact a bridge over the Corinth canal a month before the Battle of Crete began. It is also the case that a year earlier German paratroops played key roles in the campaigns in Western Europe, most notably in Norway and Belgium. It would be more accurate to say in relation to Crete that ‘they deployed paratroopers en-masse, for the very first time.’

The book is printed in a very reader-friendly font. It has nine useful maps but, in each case, instead of identifying the specific units present at various locations we see the words ‘Australian Bn’ or ‘NZ Bn’. The book has an eight-page index but many things which I’d have thought should be indexed are not. For example, while the text mentions the names of a number of RAN ships involved at various stages of the campaign, only one RAN ship (the light cruiser *HMAS Perth*) appears in the index. Fortunately, there are 20 pages of very helpful notes and a fourteen-page bibliography, both reflecting the enormous amount of time devoted to researching a topic like this. The book also includes 48 black and white photos which, taken together, cover all of the campaign.

Craig Collie is the author of a number of books, including the highly acclaimed *The Path of Infinite Sorrow: The Japanese on the Kokoda Track*. He is a TV producer-director by background and was head of TV Production at SBS.

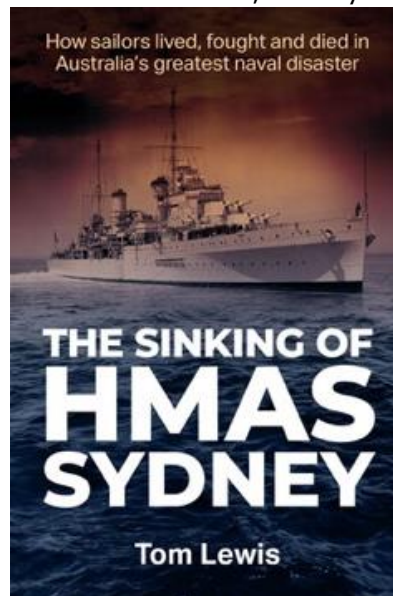
## ***The Sinking of HMAS Sydney***

**Tom Lewis**

Big Sky Publishing, 2023

Paperback 540pp RRP: \$32.99

Reviewer: Adrian Catt, January 2024



What a great read! So much more than the title indicates, this *most* interesting and exhaustive ‘almanac’ contains everything about Navy:

- Academies, officers, ratings, training, battle cruisers, armaments, supply, signals, warfare, and the Service lives of

the personnel who go to sea; in this case, and in depth, the commissioning, service and fate of *HMAS Sydney II*.

Sunk in mysterious circumstances off the coast of Western Australia in 1941 by the German raider *Kormoran*, there were to be no Australian survivors. Only a handful of German crew survived the fateful encounter and witnessed the sinking of both the *Sydney* and the *Kormoran*.

For decades, the only account of what transpired in the battle between these two ships was what the Germans were saying, and this account was viewed with strong suspicion and scepticism: How *could* the *Sydney* totally disappear, and without a single survivor? One dead Australian seaman was found on a raft; his identity was eventually confirmed after fifteen years of DNA searching, and he was accorded a burial with full Naval honours in 2021.

This book describes what happened once the wrecks of the two combatant vessels were located in 2008. Official Australian investigation decades after the loss of *HMAS Sydney* found the truth, and its surprise is revealed in this exemplary text.

Even a person with no knowledge of the Navy or interest in seafaring, will be absolutely sold on the enlightening and meticulous detail contained in this book, and be at awe of the men and their ship, whilst being let-in on the ‘secret’ which sealed the fate of *HMAS Sydney’s* crew in 1941.

Read it – you’ll enjoy it!



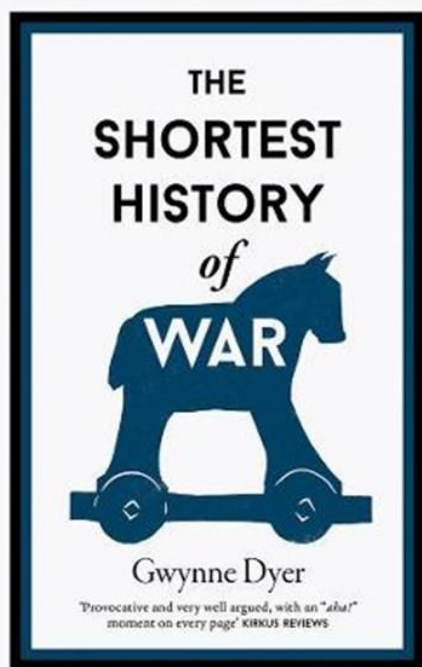
## The Shortest History of War

**Gwynne Dyer**

Collingwood, VIC: Black Inc Books, 2021  
Paperback 256 pp RRP: \$27.99

Reviewer: Neville Taylor, February 2024

Dyer has proved that 'good things come in small parcels'. This fascinatingly concise study of warfare explores every aspect of fighting since humans first walked on Earth. Running parallel to homo sapiens are the primates who, when suffering food shortages, attempt to invade other groups' territories to supplement their own supply.



The strength of armies is not unlimited. Countries need to keep their economy and their food production running in order to support their combatants. A miniscule three percent of most populations are the maximum

combatants most countries can afford. Napoleon supported his massive forces through the proceeds of plundering all countries he invaded. The Asian Steppes only had sufficient fodder to feed a large, but finite, number of cavalry horses. The Third Reich had hundreds of thousands in battle but was ultimately unable to support them with reinforcements and materiel.

### Donations to your Library Fund are Tax Deductible

Help to maintain the Institute's Library as the best collection in Victoria on defence and military related subjects by donating to your RUSI VIC Library Fund. The RUSI VIC Library Fund is a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) approved by the Australian Taxation Office, and monetary gifts to the Fund over \$2 are tax deductible by the donor.

Please make cheques to the 'RUSI VIC Inc Library Fund'. Receipts will be provided.

## Chronicle of Events *Continued from page 9*

To fund the larger fleet, the government will invest an additional \$1.7bn in defence over the four-year forward estimates, and \$11.1bn over the next decade. This will take defence spending as a proportion of GDP from just over 2 per cent to 2.4 per cent from the early 2030s.

### February 24 2024

**Russia's Special Military Operation in Ukraine started Two Years ago on 24 February 24 2022.** Russia's occupation of Crimea dates from February 20, 2014

End



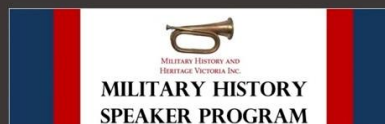
## From Books and Blackboards to Battlefields

Victoria's State School Teacher-Soldiers  
in the Great War

**Speaker: Rosalie Triolo**

MHHV Zoom Speaker Event

Wednesday 15 May 2024 7:00PM-8:00PM



## Library Notes

During the short period since our return-to-work mid-January, we have been fortunate to receive a considerable donation of books from Dr. Adrian Threlfall. This donation is largely concerned with Operations in the Southwest Pacific Area in World War II. There are a considerable number of books dealing with the Guadalcanal campaign. If you are interested in this campaign search our catalogue in the cloud for Guadalcanal.

The URL of our catalogue is [www.thecollectingbug.com/rusivictoria/](http://www.thecollectingbug.com/rusivictoria/)

Remember to use the search field that sits between our two crests on the home page.

To those members considering donating items you should be aware that our shelf space is now almost full! We are always keen to get rare items, including pamphlets, maps, and personal papers. It is most convenient if you can submit a list of those items that you consider fit into this frame. We can then compare the list with our holdings. Alternatively, please visit the library for a chat and coffee. It is always gratifying to see members at our monthly meetings at ANZAC House and catch up with their news.

All the best

**Brian Surtees**

Hon. Librarian

## New Acquisitions (since December 2023)

Books reviewed in this *Newsletter* have not been included

Title	Author	Subject
<i>Crossing the Line</i>	Nick McKenzie	The inside story of murder, lies and a fallen hero.
<i>Sword and Baton Vol 2</i>	Justin Chadwick	Senior Australian Army Officers from Federation to 2001.
<i>The Truth of War</i>	Tom Lewis	Lethality in combat.
<i>Bloody Buna</i>	David W. Cameron	The battle for the Beachhead New Guinea 1942-43.
<i>Secret Heroes of World War II</i>	Eric Chaline	Spies, scientists and other heroes.
<i>Deceptions of World</i>	Peter Darman	From camouflage techniques to War II deception tactics.



**GAME OF DOMINOES:  
AUSTRALIA'S SECURITY  
AND THE COLD WAR  
1947-1991**

THE 5TH MHHV BIENNIAL TWO-DAY CONFERENCE

**MELBOURNE**

**SATURDAY 13 & SUNDAY 14 APRIL 2024**

**PAX SOVIETICA**