



The Royal United Services Institute of Victoria, Inc.
Promoting National Security and Defence

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RUSI VIC QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

Volume 25 Issue 1 – March 2026

Editor: Mike Rawlinson

ISSN 1446 – 4527



Wedgetail to the Gulf

At the request of the Gulf nations, Australia has deployed a RAAF E-7A Wedgetail aircraft and supporting ADF personnel to the Gulf for an initial four weeks to help protect and defend Australians and other civilians. The aircraft will provide a long-range reconnaissance capability which will help secure the airspace above the Gulf.

Australia has also provided advanced medium range air-to-air missiles to the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

**Royal United Services Institute of
Victoria Incorporated
March 2026 Newsletter**

RUSI VIC -2026

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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)



In February the Minister for Defence announced the sale of many Defence properties including Victoria Barracks Melbourne. Heritage issues are likely to complicate the sale. In Victoria Barracks, thought should be given to preserving the War Cabinet Room and its surroundings. Some consideration is also promised for RUSIV and our Monash Memorial Defence Library.

When the sale goes ahead, the need for us to move is not likely to happen at once. Existing Defence staff will need new buildings, suitably wired for secret communications. This process and the actual date will take at least 12 months.

Your Council has continued to look for alternative accommodation for the RUSIV office and the Library - this is progressing well, but no outcome has been reached. We will keep you informed. It's not an easy task: we cannot afford to pay commercial rents and there are very few places where a peppercorn rental might be on offer.

In the meantime, RUSIV needs to keep good relations with Defence so that we can seek help with major costs, particularly the cost of moving our specialised library. The Monash Memorial Defence Library has a collection recognised for its national significance, containing many important rare and unique items. Wherever we land we will be faced with costs that we previously have not had to bear. We will need to seek the support and monetary contribution of every one of our members and supporters.

Regarding our lunchtime speaker program held at ANZAC House. It has been extremely difficult to secure Canberra based top level speakers. We were unsuccessful in obtaining speakers for February and March. All stops will be out in getting a speaker for April.

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.

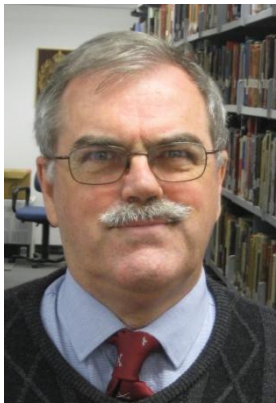
As benefactors of their generosity, we have an obligation to the publishers. They are often looking for a review to include in their publicity for the launch of a new title – so timeliness (a reasonably short turnaround time) is expected.

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

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

From the Secretary:

Lieutenant Colonel Bob Hart RFD



Dear Members,

As a few of you have had difficulty with the way of paying subs, I have had a discussion with our bank, Defence Bank.!

In accordance with the desire of the Banking community to eliminate cheques, Defence Bank is no longer issuing Cheque Books. However, it appears that the main 4 banks and some of their subsidiaries are still issuing and receiving cheques. And Defence Bank is therefore still accepting them. I didn't ask why we were told no cheques!!

So, until further notice, you can still send me a cheque for your subs. Hope this makes things easier for those yet to pay their subs.

We have been advised of the passing of Ian Murray and Jonathan Burdon.

We welcome new members:

Stephen Penreath, Simon McGregor, William Comley, David Cartier, Dan Exeter and Rob Wight."

Bob Hart

VIETNAM 30/50
THIRTY YEARS OF WAR/FIFTY YEARS OF REFLECTION
1945 - 2025
16 - 17 MAY 2026
WAVERLEY RSL

MILITARY HISTORY AND HERITAGE VICTORIA INC. VIETNAM CENTER & SAM JOHNSON VIETNAM ARCHIVE
BIG SKY PUBLISHING History Guild

The poster features a photograph of a military helicopter landing in a field with soldiers nearby.

Library Notes

The First quarter of the year has been largely devoted to maintenance tasks in the library. Library labels on books fade with time and must be replaced, this is a repetitive time-consuming task somewhat like painting the Sydney Harbour bridge.

While there is uncertainty about the library's future location, we have great expectations regarding additions to the collection.

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.

As part of its role the Institute is custodian of the Monash Memorial Defence Library, the largest collection of Defence volumes in Victoria which has public accessibility. While the Institute has always had support from the Department of Defence, in recent years this support has been pared back, increasing the financial burden to members.

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, Bob Hart, at 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 executor.

Opinion: Energy Security is National Security

Mike Rawlinson

Some Geopolitics

Australia no longer has a 10-year warning time of conflict. Xi Jing Ping instructed the PLA to be ready to take Taiwan by 2027 (That's next year). Any time in the next five years conflict over Taiwan is likely to involve conflict between China and the United States, in which Australia most likely would be involved as a US ally and host to US forces. While a military attack on Australia is most unlikely, Australia could anticipate a severe disruption to trade, and a full panoply of grey zone activities.

The Fuel Crisis

An unintended consequence of President Trumps' war on Iran, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, has demonstrated to the Australian public the importance of liquid fossil fuels in our daily lives, and the vulnerability of its supply chain to disruption.

Mining, agriculture and transport which are the big earners of our economy and are vitally dependent on diesel. Most Australians are city dwellers and have watched the petrol price at the bowser respond to shortages of supply. Jet fuel, fertilizer, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and plastics are also affected.

Fossil fuels, coal, oil and gas, make up 91% of Australia's primary energy mix. Oil makes up 41%. From the 2020 Liquid Fuel Security Review: 'Liquid Fuel is the backbone of the Australian Economy'.

Australian oil extraction has been declining, and for 'climate change' decarbonisation and environmental reasons exploration has not been encouraged. In 2000 Australia had eight refineries. These were old and uncompetitive with Asian refineries and have been progressively closed. Mega refineries in South-East Asia, mainly Singapore and South Korea now supply 80% of diesel, petrol and jet fuel. This refined product is from Middle East crude that has been transported through the Strait of Malacca. China provides 32% of jet fuel. Australia's two remaining refineries at Geelong and Brisbane refine 20% of the nation's overall requirements from imported crude.

Following the 1973 Oil Shock the International Energy Agency (IEA) was formed and member countries, including Australia, agreed to maintain buffer oil stocks equal to 90 days of net imports, to prevent future disruption. Australia has been in breach of this agreement since 2012.

Australia has about 30 days of onshore liquid fuel reserves. Australian Federal Governments have been warned for decades that fuel reserves were inadequate, particularly as strategic circumstances deteriorated. In 2013 the NRMA produced a comprehensive report by AVM (Retd) John Blackburn that highlighted Australia's

vulnerability. Until a crisis, when it is too late, there are few votes in increasing fuel reserves. With a focus on possible conflict over Taiwan and the South China Sea, strategic analysts have been more concerned about potential blockages in the Straits of Malacca, Sunda and Lombok than the Strait of Hormuz.

While governments have responded positively and have subsidised the operation of the Geelong and Brisbane refineries, funds have not been allocated to significantly increase onshore storage to the IEA agreed 90 days of imports. Hopefully the current fuel crisis will be short lived but will pressure government to increase our sovereign capability by supporting oil exploration, increasing refinery capacity, increasing onshore storage. Biofuel development and a capacity for coal liquefaction could also contribute towards self-reliance in liquid fuels. On the positive side, a large-scale urea fertilizer plant is currently under construction on WA's Burrup Peninsula, using gas from the North West Shelf field. Also, the Albanese government has committed to acquiring an Australian flagged tanker fleet.

The fuel crisis has demonstrated that Energy Security in liquid fuels is a vital component of National Security.

Energy Policy

National Security requires sovereign capabilities in critical areas, and a defence force of sufficient size and capability to be able to inflict unacceptable losses upon an adversary. While the ADF is respected as a highly professional, force, it is currently seriously short of some capabilities. Most analysts agree that Australia needs to increase its defence budget from the current 2% of GDP to at least 3.5%. This will require some reprioritisation in federal funding.

Energy policy in Australia has been dominated by climate change decarbonisation and a transition to renewable electricity generation by wind and solar. The transition has resulted in an increase in the price of energy which has had a dampening effect on the economy. There is also doubt that firmed renewables alone can provide energy that is secure, reliable and affordable.

Australia can anticipate increases in energy demand from electric vehicles (EVs), data centres, population increases, desalination plants, reindustrialisation as well as military operations.

As well as being vulnerable to disruption of liquid fuel imports, Australia's energy system is vulnerable in having a single source of supply for most components. China provides most of our solar panels, wind turbines. EVs and batteries as well as 32% of our Jet Fuel. Blockage of the Strait of Hormuz has given Australia a wake-up call for governments to improve the nation's resilience. Energy Security is National Security.

<p>To be prepared for war is one of the most effective means of preserving peace. George Washington</p>

Victoria's Military History and Heritage

Victoria Barracks Melbourne

Marcus Fielding

This article originally appeared in the August 2012 Newsletter

Located on St Kilda Road, Victoria Barracks Melbourne is of architectural and historical significance as one of the most impressive 19th century government buildings in Victoria.

The Barracks were originally built as accommodation for British Imperial Garrison troops, including the 12th and 40th Regiments of Foot (who were involved in putting down the armed Eureka Stockade rebellion in Ballarat Victoria), and later the Colony of Victoria's colonial forces.

The Barracks housed the Departments of the Navy, Army from the creation of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901 and later the Air Force, until 1958 when they began relocating to the new Russell Offices in Canberra.

The earliest building (now G Block) at Victoria Barracks was built by soldiers of the 40th Regiment, under the supervision of a Royal Engineer officer between 1856 and 1858, while the remaining bluestone buildings (including A Block) were built by civil contractors between 1856 and 1872.

A large extension (now A Block New Wing) was added in 1917 and while it looked like the original A Block building the construction method and interior was completely modern for the time.

Another modern, for the time, art deco building (now M Block) was added in 1939 and the floor was the first continuous concrete pour in Australia.



The War Cabinet meeting around the large oval table in the War Cabinet room. Cigarette boxes and ashtrays were provided, 1943.
Australian War Memorial: ID 139923

During World War II, Victoria Barracks Melbourne housed the Australian War Cabinet. The War Cabinet comprised senior MP's from the Government and Opposition parties. The wartime Prime Ministers (Robert Menzies and later John Curtin) also had offices near the War Cabinet Room throughout the war.

The Defence Secretariat occupied the second floor of the A Block New Wing which also contained the office of senior military staff, the Secretary of the Department Defence (Sir Frederick Shedden), visiting Ministers of State and their secretaries and support staff, and the War Cabinet room.

Myth has it that the US General Douglas MacArthur had an office at the Barracks however this is not true.

His Headquarters South-West Pacific Area was initially established in a building on Collins Street in the Melbourne CBD before relocating to Brisbane in July 1942.

It was in fact General Sir Thomas Blamey who had his HQ at the Barracks while serving as Commander-in-Chief, Australian Military Forces, and simultaneously in multinational command as Commander-in-Chief Allied Land Forces in the South-West Pacific Area.



In 2012 Victoria Barracks Melbourne accommodated the corporate headquarters and ten Systems Program Offices (business units) of the Defence Materiel Organisation's Land Systems Division, as well as elements of Joint Logistics Command and the Defence Service Group.

Book Reviews

This newsletter has six Book Reviews. On behalf of members the Editor thanks the reviewers. The Monash Memorial Defence Library is most grateful to the authors and publishers for providing copies for review. If you would like a hard copy of a review, please contact the Secretary.

Trails to Freedom

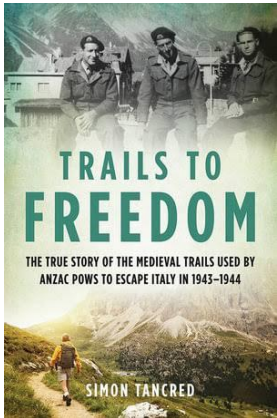
Simon Tancred

Richmond, VIC: Hardie Grant, 2025

Paperback 288pp \$34.99

Reviewer: Janet Roberts-Billett, January 2026

Trails to Freedom commemorates the courage and perseverance of some escaped Australian and New Zealand prisoners-of-war who in 1943, managed to walk from Italy across the Alps into Switzerland and freedom. Cate Carrigan, the daughter of Carl Carrigan who had been a prisoner-of-war in Italy during World War II and



had escaped with three friends across the Alps, approached Simon to ask if he would be interested in taking her family members on a trek to visit the places that Carl had moved through in his journey to freedom.

Simon Tancred the author who had taken hiking tours to Italy before, thought this was a wonderful challenge so he researched and set out to walk the same route. His

motivation was that in doing so he could also commemorate his uncle, John Tancred who had been a prisoner-of-war of the Italian fascist regime at the same time. John had perished when the ship, *Nino Bixio* in which he was incarcerated, was torpedoed by HMS/S *Turbulent* in the Mediterranean, enroute to Italy in August 1943.

The author planned his trek from Milan by train and started hiking from Biella, a prosperous textile centre in northern Italy. His aim was to hike the route followed by Carl Carrigan and his companions, Paul Carrigan his brother, Ron Fitzgerald and Lloyd Ledingham in 1943. It would be a 100-kilometre trek over some of the harshest and most forbidding terrain in the world.

These escaping Australian soldiers had no maps, no guides, no food and spoke very little Italian. Their clothing was also what they had been wearing when they were released, not suitable for hiking mountain trails or the weather and they were passing through occupied German territory. When Italy under Mussolini withdrew from the Axis agreement, many young Italian

soldiers deserted, possibly 600,000 and numbers of these eventually joined the partisans. While the men were assisted by some of the early partisans, the network for resistance against the occupying Germans was only set up in late 1943.

The trek was Incredibly difficult up many valleys, steep mountains, forests and along narrow trails which had been used for thousands of years by travellers, (not just the medieval routes that the title states) up to the pass at Monte Moro just below the third largest mountain in this area, Monte Rosa. Incredibly the Australians succeeded in reaching Switzerland on 3 October 1943. Their trek had taken fourteen days. Following D-Day in June 1944, the men were gradually repatriated back to Australia.

The history of Australian prisoners-of-war has tended to be dominated by the horrors of those who were captured by the Japanese in Southeast Asia. This book documents the experiences of Australians who were captured in other World War II theatres of war of whom there were many – soldiers captured in Crete, North Africa, navy men captured when ships were torpedoed and airmen shot down. The author records that over 500 Australians and New Zealanders were assisted by the Italians, at great risk to themselves and their families to reach freedom in Switzerland by this particular route over the Monte Moro Pass.

As the author documents his day-to-day trek, he also includes his own experiences, including the conversations with the locals he meets, the accommodation and food he experiences, the wonderful scenery and his problems with the weather and the harsh terrain. Where relevant, he has researched historical information relating to the people who live in the mountainous terrain, for instance the Walser people who settled in the high mountain pastures of the Alps between 1150 and 1450 (possibly fleeing religious persecution). His narrative also weaves in detail about the deportation of Jews, the escape techniques used by the Resistance, the liberation of Allied prisoners-of-war, particularly the British of whom there were also nearly 18,000 who had remained in Italy, sheltered by the locals at the end of the war.

This is a very interesting book which augments more detail for Australians about the war in the Mediterranean and Italy during World War II. The numerous photographs of the author's trek included in black and white though, could be clearer for the reader and the inclusion of an index and a map with more topographical details would have helped readers identify the route more easily. Overall, *Trails to Freedom* is an important contribution to Australia's involvement in a world conflict, now 80 years ago and the author's contribution in researching and actually walking the escape route to commemorate these men will enrich our memories and knowledge of this time.

War and Power *Who Wins Wars - and Why*

Phillips Payson O'Brien

North Sydney, NSW: Penguin Random House, 2025
Paperback 310pp RRP: \$36.99

Reviewer: Nic Maheshwari, November 2025

This book takes a comprehensive look at all aspects of power and how it influences war. The author covers the Western war periods from the late nineteenth century to the current Russia-Ukraine war, with extensive emphasis on the two World Wars.



'One of our finest historical thinkers' James Holland

WAR AND POWER

Who Wins Wars - and Why

PHILLIPS PAYSON O'BRIEN



Part One of the book considers the elements that define whether a country is powerful enough or not. The author argues that just having a huge military with modern weapons is not enough. For instance,

considering the military strength during the recent Russia-Ukraine war, the author provides examples and quotes of how several analysts and politicians had overestimated Russia's military power and underestimated Ukraine's ability to fight back ('Ukraine would fall in a matter of days'). A state also needs strong leadership, support of the society, a high military morale, and strong allies to win a war. Taking Germany as another example, just before the Second World War, Great Britain tried (and failed) to ally with Germany, while during the war, Germany broke the Nazi-Soviet Treaty by invading the USSR. This led to Germany fighting wars on the east and west simultaneously, which dealt heavy blows to its military. When it sought support from its allies, Mussolini's Italy refused (turning into a weaker ally as a result) while the Japanese were too far away to give any considerable assistance. Based on these elements, the author coined the term 'full-spectrum state' rather than a 'superpower nation'.

In Part Two, the author argues that the evolution of five elements - leadership, societal commitments, technological advancements, mass production, and allies - greatly influences the

course and outcome of war. The role of leadership heightens during war - making decisions (good or poor) on strategy, economy and technology impact its outcome. During the Second World War Hitler personally decreed the Messerschmitt Me 262 jets to be dive-bombers rather than fighter jets. By the time he realised his mistake, it was too late and the Me 262 fighter jets made little impact.

Throughout the book and covering multiple periods of war, the author demystifies the notion that most wars are won on land and shows (through data) that investment in air power increases considerably before and during any given war. Leaders realise keeping a low number of human casualties is key to getting the backing of the society which has been one of the deciding factors in several wars. When a society no longer believes a war can be won or is worth the effort, it leads to a natural defeat, as shown in the case of the Vietnam War.

In the concluding chapters, the author focuses on two full-spectrum states (US and China) and how their current leaders, societies and allies can shape the course of any future wars between these two sides in the Indo-Pacific region. With the recent shake up in world economics and alliances by the Trump administration, it is yet to be seen how impactful it might be in a future war between these two sides (and their allies).

Overall, the book is easy to read and digest. It contains no military jargon. The chapters are well connected and flow easily into the next ones. With the hyperconnected world we live in, the author could have covered wars in other parts of the world (especially countries in the Indo-Pacific region such as Australia and India) and how they shaped leaderships, policies and societies that we see today globally.



E7A Wedgetail – 2 SQN RAAF

The Courageous Life of Weary Dunlop

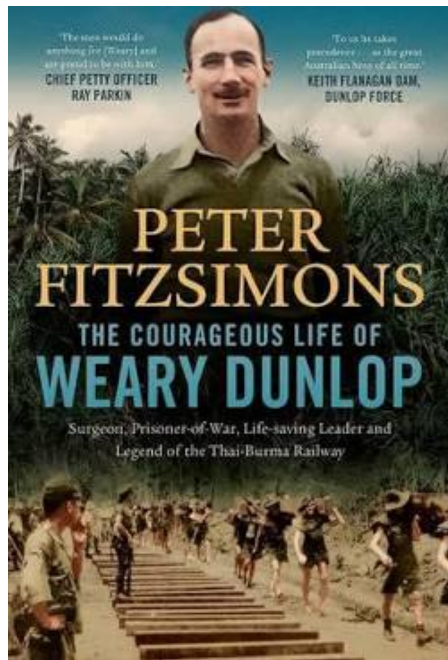
Peter FitzSimons

Sydney, NSW: Hachette, 2024

Hardback 560pp RRP: \$49.99

Reviewer: David Rees, February 2026

Like many of Peter FitzSimons' books about famous Australian historical figures, this book about Weary Dunlop's life is an enthralling and engaging story,



written in a dramatic, popular style that makes it easy to read. Many books have been written about Weary Dunlop, such as *The Life of Sir Edward Dunlop* by Sue Ebury and *The War Diaries of Weary Dunlop* by Weary himself, to mention only a couple. So,

there were plenty of historical references to draw on for any author to update the story. This book includes 42 pages of endnotes, a large bibliography, many photos, clear maps, and a good index. As a fellow Wallaby rugby player, Peter FitzSimons holds Weary in very high esteem, especially as Weary in 1932 and 1934 was one of the rare Wallabies to come from Victoria. He was in the Australian team that won the Bledisloe Cup against New Zealand in 1934.

Earnest Edward Dunlop was born in Wangaratta in 1907. He attended Benalla High School before winning a scholarship to the University of Melbourne, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery in 1934. He played rugby for the University side and was a born leader, a proven fighter, a courageous and upright strong character. When World War II broke out on 3rd September 1939, he was at the Royal College of Surgeons in London, UK. Still, with the help of his friends in Melbourne, he was able to join the Australian Army Medical Corps (AAMC) of the AIF without returning to Australia.

Just after the start of the war, the Australian army posted Weary to the AIF 6th Division, which was based in the Middle East. He worked as a surgeon at various hospitals and in the 2/2nd Casualty Clearing Station (CCS) located in North Africa, Palestine, and Greece. However, when Japan simultaneously invaded Malaya and attacked the American naval fleet at Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941, the 6th and 7th AIF Divisions were recalled by the Australian Government to the Indo-Pacific area to protect Australia against a possible Japanese invasion. A convoy with the 6th Division, which included Major Dunlop, left for Australia in late January 1942 from Suez. It arrived in Batavia a few weeks later, and most of the Australian soldiers, including Major Dunlop and his 2/2nd CCS, disembarked at Batavia. Their orders were to assist the Dutch in fighting the Japanese, who had invaded Sumatra and Java. Weary Dunlop, now a lieutenant colonel, took command of the No 1 Allied General Hospital at Bandoeng, Java, and, assisted by his team of doctors and medical orderlies, took care of the Australian, British and Dutch wounded and sick personnel. By the 8th of March 1942, all of Java and Sumatra had been occupied by the Japanese. Over 3000 Australians under Brigadier Arthur Blackburn VC, as well as the staff and 620 patients at Bandoeng Hospital, became prisoners of war (POWs).

Most of the book is devoted to describing in detail how Weary Dunlop and his medical assistants managed to survive and help sustain the Australian POWs in Java from March 1942 until January 1943 and on the Thai-Burma Railway from January 1943 to October 1943. The POWs suffered from malnutrition, malaria, cholera, dysentery and tropical ulcers to name just a few diseases and were continually subjected to the most profound and sadistic brutality from their Japanese and Korean captors

Over 2800 Australians died on the Thai-Burma railway, but thanks to Weary Dunlop and his assistants, many lives were saved. Sir Edward Dunlop AC, CMG., OBE., ICSJ., MS., FRCS, FRACS, LL.D Melb (Hons) died in July 1993, and at his state funeral, the PM stated that: 'He was courageous, determined, humble and above all ever generous in helping those who needed help. He was admired and even beloved by many'. This is a really inspiring story, and the book is highly recommended.

Action Stations

Horsham Joins the Navy

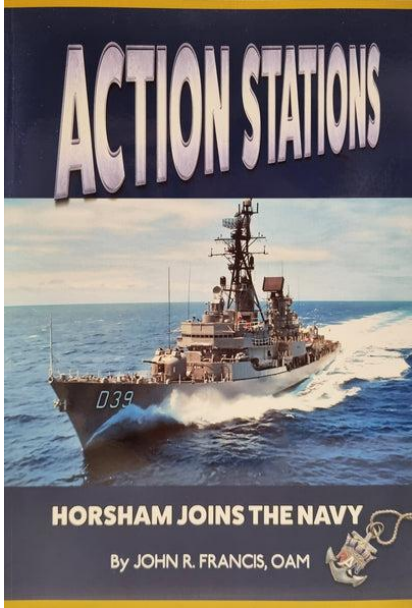
John R Francis OAM

Canberra ACT: John Francis, 2023

Paperback 452pp RRP:\$89.99

Reviewer: Neville Taylor, December 2025

This is a testament to John Francis' endeavour and determination to record the history of those for whom Horsham was their 'home town' and chose to serve in the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) from 1911 until recent conflicts in the 1970s.



At the beginning there is excellent guidance for the reader to become au fait with naval ranks, language and nicknames, acronyms and service abbreviations. Then follows a six-page roll call of those mentioned in the text. A

comprehensive explanation of the creation of the RAN, its personnel and its

vessels forms the opening section of the book. (For the book's entire length there are photographs of people and vessels aplenty.) Examination of the years prior to the First World War and those immediately after includes the narrative of the naval engagements with enemy ships.

The biographies of individuals include every detail that the author was able to track down – from interviews with surviving relatives, council and voting records, naval records, collected memorabilia, and the Navy Sea Power Centre, Canberra. Parents are usually listed, date of birth, height and hair colour, ships served on and actions, and their life after the RAN.

A special section is devoted to the service of women in the Navy during the Second World War and subsequently. Originally serving in the RAN in 1940 in the Women's Emergency Signalling Corps, they entered the RAN as telegraphists in 1941 working in Belconnen Transmitting Station and Harman Receiving Station in Canberra. The following year they were able to undertake other roles such as drivers, clerks, storekeepers and orderlies. In 1959 they achieved permanent employment as WRANs and in 1985 became officially part of the RAN. Some interesting anecdotes from these women have been included with the main highlight being the collegiality they developed and their continued reunions to this day.

The major part of *Action Stations* is devoted to those who served in the Second World War. The history of many of the vessels involved is described from their launch prior to the outbreak of the War. Despite there being a 'Horsham representative' on all but one ship in the conflict, only six of the sailors mentioned in the text lost their life.

The three decades from the 1950s to the 1970s follow in the next section of this work – encompassing the Korean War, The Malayan Emergency, the Indonesian Confrontation, the Far East Strategic Reserve and the Vietnam War. A brief synopsis of the prelude to each conflict has been provided along with illustrations of the medals available for participants in each campaign, prior to the biographies of combatants and the vessels they served on.

The final section examines the Sinai Multinational Force and Observers (1982 -1986) and the Gulf War. In January 1991 just after Operation DESERT SHIELD transitioned to Operation DESERT, HMAS *Westralia* arrived in the Middle East Area of Operations, with an operational ADF first in that the ship's company included seven women. *Westralia's* role was to provide additional air defence capability for the aircraft carriers and other larger ships.

The author enlisted in the RAN in January 1966 at seventeen and saw four rotations with the Far East Strategic Reserve visiting numerous countries in Southeast Asia. On discharge from the RAN in 1976 he joined the Victoria Police for five years, then worked with the Portland Harbour Authority. Francis attended the 1979 Sail Training Association's annual meeting in London in the bid to secure the Tall Ships for our 1988 Bicentennial. Becoming a Naval Reserve Cadet officer, he led the Portland Cadet Unit in the granting of the Freedom of Entry ceremony. He received his Order of Australia Medal in 1996 for service to the community. In retirement he is a volunteer at the Sea Power Centre - Australia in Canberra where he now resides.

To say the *Action Stations* is John Francis' magnum opus is rather an understatement. He has used an enormous database created by his wife to identify those individuals who needed to be included in his work. He then has tirelessly interviewed the men and women, their friends and relatives as well as searching records to create highly-detailed biographies. Then came the unenviable task of self-publishing this enormous tome.

This is an outstanding work that has already found its place in Horsham's historical records and is an eye-opener for those who have yet to discover the impact of maritime service upon our communities.

[A few remaining copies of *Action Stations* are available from jrf5248@gmail.com]

Tank

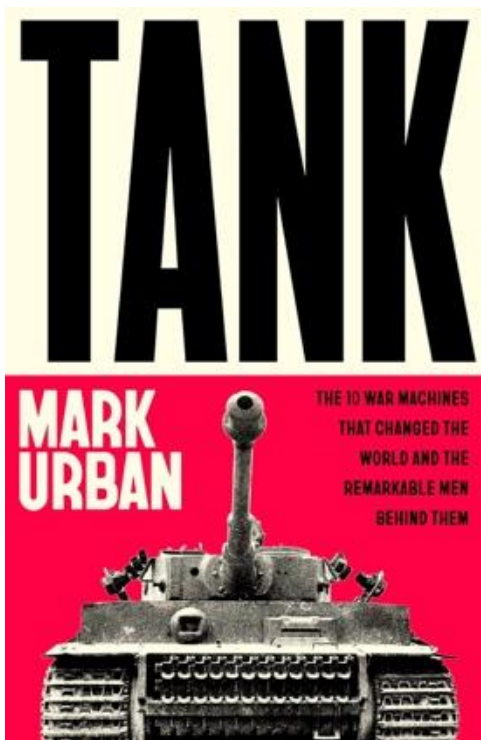
The 10 War Machines That Changed the World and the Remarkable Men Behind Them

Mark Urban

North Sydney, NSW: Penguin Random House, 2025
Paperback 352pp RRP: \$36.99

Reviewer: Dan Exeter, January 2026

Mark Urban's book is an attempt to tell the story of the tank up to present day without ending up with a huge weighty tome that would only be of interest to very few. Instead, he deliberately focuses on the stories of 10 specific vehicles and through those he tells the story of how the concept has evolved over time.



The 10 vehicles are:

Mark IV	Renault FT
Panzer IV	
T-34	Sherman
Tiger	
Centurion	T-64
Merkava	
M1 Abrams	

As a former British 'tankie' myself, that list makes a lot of sense and doesn't seem controversial to me. If you were nit-picking you might ask why perhaps the Leopard family didn't make the cut, and potentially you could pick several Soviet tanks (T-55 or possibly T-72) instead of or indeed as well as the T-64. That said, Mark Urban does explain his choices and he is well qualified to do so having been in the Royal Tank Regiment on Chieftain tanks in his younger days.

He is somewhat better known for his long career as a journalist and having written several other military history books in his time. His style is readable and

engaging and I think well plots a sensible course between being sufficiently technical to interest those who might know a bit about the topic and being sufficiently general so that you don't need to be an expert to enjoy the stories.

The chapters for each vehicle are relatively short and well-paced. They start with a little vignette of the vehicle in action, then a short summary of its history and achievements and then a scroll forward to either how it's time ended or what its influence is now.

The inclusion of several photos (including each of the tanks written about) is welcome and appreciated. I did find myself sometimes wanting to see photos of tanks mentioned in passing (e.g., compare a M60 to a Merkava, that sort of thing). Younger generations I know are quite willing to whip a phone or tablet out and do a search; maybe I just need to get with the times.

As befits the background of the author and the main intended audience it is focused on key campaigns that mainly western nations fought: so for example Australian use of Centurions in Vietnam is mentioned only peripherally, while there is no mention at all of tank developments over time in (say) China or the rest of Asia. This is to nitpick however, and those stories are perhaps best told in a different way than trying to include them in what is meant to be an accessible general history of the tank.

Overall I did enjoy reading it and I commend it not just to fellow ex-black beret wearers, but to anyone with even a passing interest in tanks.

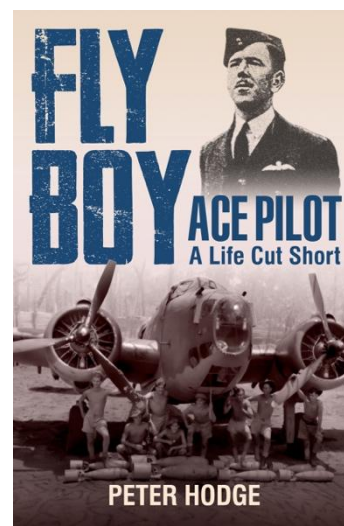
Fly Boy

Ace Pilot – A Life Cut Short

Peter Hodge

Newport, NSW: Big Sky Publishing, 2025
Paperback. 320pp RRP: \$34.99

Reviewer: Robert Dixon, December 2025



The *Fly Boy* referred to in the title of this book is Parker 'Joe' Hodge, a Royal Australian Air Force pilot who lost his life in the Dutch East Indies during World War II. He was born in 1913 at Beechworth, the youngest of 14 children and enlisted in the RAAF in April 1935. Initially engaged as a fitter, he was accepted in January 1938 to train as a pilot at No. 1 Flying Training School Point Cook and

was presented with his 'wings' in December 1938. Graduating as a Pilot Officer he was promoted to Flying

Officer in June 1940 by which time he was a pilot in 2 Squadron flying Hudson Bombers. Following the outbreak of World War II the squadron began maritime patrol and convoy escort operations off the Australian eastern coast. Hodge was promoted to Flight Lieutenant in October 1941. In early December of that year his squadron moved from Australia to operate out of airfields in the Dutch East Indies. He died when his aircraft was shot down by Japanese Zeros on the 12th of January 1942 (his was one of four Hudson's lost that day).

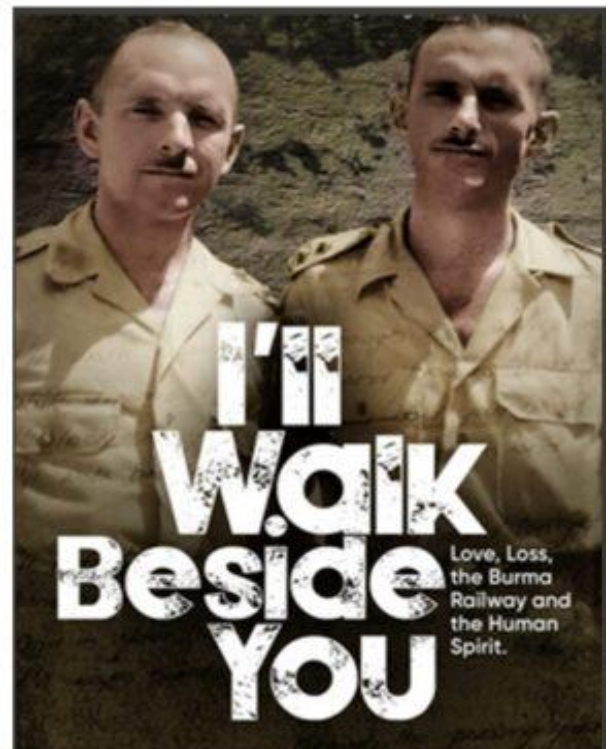
The book is very well written but I am puzzled by a number of statements made by the author and/or publisher. For example, the 'Pacific Star' was a campaign medal and not, as the author claims, a reward for 'outstanding services' (p 144) and I am not sure why Hodge is described in the title of the book as an 'ace' pilot. There is nothing in the book to justify referring to him as an 'ace' – a term usually used to refer to a pilot who has shot-down five or more enemy aircraft. There is also a misleading passage on the back cover of the book where we are told that 'Fly Boy *chronicles* the life of Parker 'Joe' Hodge' (my emphasis). I do not accept the description of this book as a 'chronicle'. The OED defines a chronicle as: 'A detailed and continuous register of events in order of time; a historical record, especially one in which the facts are narrated without philosophic treatment, or any attempt at literary style'. This work is not a 'chronicle' or a 'historical record' for the simple reason that, in the absence of many sources of information (including Hodge's Pilot's Logbook) the author often has to resort to conjecture. For example we often find phrases like, 'what did Joe do, I wonder ...', 'most likely explanation', 'may have been', 'it seems likely', 'I imagine' and 'perhaps'. Having said that, the description of the contents of the book on the back cover goes on to say: 'Author Peter Hodge's quest to uncover Joe's story becomes a profound exploration of lost family connections and self-discovery.' This statement is a very good description of the contents of the book. Part biography, part family history and part a collection of reminiscences by the author (and in that sense 'an autobiography'), it is not clear to me who might want to read this book other than members of the Hodge family. Perhaps someone with an interest in the history of the RAAF and especially pilot training in the inter-war period may find some chapters of interest, as may anyone who has a special interest in aircraft flown by the RAAF in the 30s and early 40s and especially the Avro Anson and the Lockheed Hudson.

The book includes sixteen black and white and sepia-tone photographs. It has a reader-friendly font size but lacks an Index.

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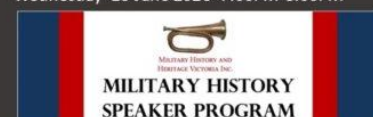
I'll Walk Beside You

Love, Loss, the Burma Railway and the Human Spirit

Speaker: Peter Mitchell

MHHV Zoom Speaker Event

Wednesday 10 June 2026 7:00PM-8:00PM



New Acquisitions (since December 2025)

Books reviewed in this *Newsletter* have not been included

Title	Author	Subject
<i>Operation Cleeves</i>	Kathleen Reid-Smith	SOE's forgotten wartime tragedy in Thailand.
<i>The CAC Boomerang</i>	Don Williams	Australia's own WWII fighter.
<i>Guts and Glory</i>	Peter Rees	Diggers, sport and war.
<i>Come on Australia</i>	<i>Lewis Frederickson and Victor Nurcombe</i>	The Great War Service of Lieutenant Colonel Terence McSharry CMG DSO* MC
<i>The Laws of Yesterday's Wars</i>	Samuel White (Ed)	From Indigenous Australians to the American Civil War.
<i>Search for Security</i>	Mark Beeson, Kanishka Jayasuriya and Sian Troath (Eds)	AUKUS and the new militarism.
<i>How Wars End Burying the Enemy</i>	Jan van Aken Tim Grady	A hopeful history of making peace. The story of those who cared for the dead in two World Wars.
<i>A Ceaseless Watch</i>	Angus Britts	Australia's Third-Party Naval Defense, 1919-1942.
<i>From the Skies [Australian Air Power Series #11]</i>	Karyn Maxwell	Australian air power in humanitarian aid and disaster relief since the Second World War.
<i>A Mouse at Moresby</i>	Irvine and Tony Green	A firsthand account of a World War II: RAAF photographer in New Guinea.
<i>Wings over Malayan Jungle</i>	David Mitchelhill-Green	No 1 Squadron (RAAF) Lincoln bombers in the Malayan Emergency.
<i>Dogs of War</i>	Nigel Allsop	Guardians of the battlefield: True stories of loyalty and bravery.
<i>Huey</i>	Mark Lax	The helicopter that became an Australian legend.
<i>Solomons Air War</i>	Michael Claringbould, Peter Ingman	Guadalcanal August – September <i>Volume 1</i> 1942.