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## Commemoration, memory, and forgotten histories: The complexity and limitations of Australian Army biography

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## **Commemoration, Memory, and Forgotten Histories: The Complexity and Limitations of Australian Army Biography**

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### *Abstract*

Military biography in Australia raises questions about the specific historiography more generally, and about the commemorative and celebratory tendencies in Australian military writing. Recent advances in the field illustrate the continuing tensions within the writing of military history in Australia, and reflect some of the same tendencies elsewhere in the English speaking world.

### *Article*

In June 2001 Dr Chris Clark made a number of observations regarding 'Exploring the history of the Australian Army through biography'.<sup>1</sup> Central to his argument was the lack of commitment by historians to this genre and the relative few biographies that have been written. In the years since these comments were made a number of factors have changed, but the overarching question still remains — how far has biography been utilized in understanding the history of the Australian army and why for so long was it such a neglected genre?

Traditionally, literature reviews of this type have often restricted their investigations to merely chronicling the new additions to the genre and passing judgement on the quality of the work produced. While these are important areas to be addressed, the framework for this investigation is broader. It seeks to address the question as to why for so long was this genre neglected, especially by academic historians, and what has changed in recent years that has led to a new environment for Australian historians, and their community alike, that

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Clark, 'Exploring the History of the Australian Army Through Biography', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 34 (June 2001) <<http://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j34/armybiog.asp>>. [Accessed 13 March 2002].

is more comfortable with military biography. Last it looks how and why this genre must continue to develop in order to broaden our knowledge of the Australian army's history. It is once again timely to assess the role of biography in the history of the Australian army.

### *Military history and Australia's past*

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries generations of young school children throughout Australia were inspired by tales of the British Empire at war. They were enculturated with the glories of the past, with the view to be ready for duty and sacrifice in the name of King, Country, and Empire. Young boys were urged to emulate the deeds of the great warriors of Empire;<sup>2</sup> Nelson of Trafalgar, Wellington of Waterloo, Gordon of Khartoum. These were men of action; leaders in combat, great names forever linked in the chronicles of time to a great battle. In consequence, these heroes, along with their military virtues of 'courage, daring, fortitude, love of country, [and] self-sacrifice became the measure of Australian heroism too'.<sup>3</sup>

Before Federation, Australians had always looked overseas for their great military men. European Australia had to wait over a hundred years to pit its soldiers in 'great' battles that produced deeds worthy of inclusion into the history of the British Empire. In the proceeding decades the absence of such opportunities had seen the explorers of the Australian continent elevated to the stage of public and historical consciousness.<sup>4</sup> Names such as Burke and Wills, Sturt, and Mitchell embodied the same notions of sacrifice and devotion to duty that personified the heroic military leaders of the British Empire and as such these explorers were celebrated and mythologized in the statues and monuments that ceremonially adorn Australia's city landscapes. It was to Burke and Wills that the first bronze statue cast in Australian was raised in 1865 and it was the statue that, in the nineteenth century, was the favoured form of public expression to encapsulate the achievements of the individual.<sup>5</sup> It was a testimony to those that could be considered distinguished or worthy of high esteem.<sup>6</sup>

During this period the absence of any home grown military leaders meant that, excluding governors and public officials, the British General, Charles Gordon, was the only soldier to have a statue erected in his honour. He represented a type of warrior that embodied a

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<sup>2</sup> Richard White, *Inventing Australia* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 126; Martin Crotty, *Making of the Australian Male* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2001), p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2000), p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Graeme Davison, 'Hero's and Heroine's', in Davison et al., *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 310–11.

<sup>5</sup> K.S. Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials and the Australian Landscape* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), p. 28. By 1880 the Australian colonies could claim only three major public statues: Sir Richard Bourke (1842) and Prince Albert (1866) in Sydney, and Burke and Wills in Melbourne. See Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Inglis, p. 26.

mythology of Empire. At the base his towering bronze figure lie the words: 'THIS IS HE THAT EVERY MAN IN ARMS SHOULD WISH TO BE'.<sup>7</sup>

One could expect that with the heavy contribution of Australia to the First World War there would have been a considerable number of statues in honour of Australia's newfound heroes. However, the battles of the First World War shattered notions of great victories and great leaders and 'dealt a heavy blow to ideas of individual heroism'.<sup>8</sup>

The concept of 'sacrifice' personified by Gordon of Khartoum in the nineteenth century seemed completely redundant in the post-First World War period. Sacrifice was no longer 'noble', sacrifice was now seen by many to signify nonsensical slaughter. Under this cloak of national grieving, with no great victories to hail and no truly great leaders to honour, the official historian Charles Bean sought not to elevate the leaders of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in 1914–1918 to national icons, but rather to celebrate and honour the Australian soldier. The great men of Australia's military history became, in effect, the ordinary men.<sup>9</sup>

Even before the Great War and the creation of the Anzac legend, the notion of the 'ordinary man' as the hero in Australia's military history was enshrined in the tradition of remembrance. In the period from the Boer War to the First World War the statues that decorated the Australian countryside were 'not of an officer, or of any individual, but of a type: history at last had delivered to monument-makers a local hero, the citizen as soldier'.<sup>10</sup>

Consequently, there was little room for an Australian Wellington or Nelson in post-war Australia, and furthermore they were hard to find amongst the carnage of First and Second World Wars. The historical epoch that had educated and moulded Australia's youth to be the next generation of 'great' Victorian era military men had ended in 1918 with a war that had subsequently confined them to the sidelines of history.

This fall from grace was no more prominently displayed than in the absence of 'sites of memory' for Australia's generals of the First and Second World Wars. In the post-First World War era Australia's monuments became, as Davison argued, 'more democratic' and less representative of the 'heroic individual [. . .] The shift in terminology from "monument" — with its associations of celebration and glorification — to "memorial" or "shrine" was indicative of the public mood'.<sup>11</sup> These ideas were also encapsulated when the deeds of 'heroes' were chronicled in prose and verse as opposed to bronze and stone.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> Inglis, p. 5; Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> Inglis, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, pp. 46–47. As Davison points out, statues of Australia's wartime leaders of the First and Second World War (Monash and Blamey) do exist, however, 'they were now

The changing nature of commemoration also saw the exclusion of Australia's military leaders from public space and public memory. This decline in public recognition was further fostered by the 'undervaluation of [. . .] militarism in Australia', and the dominance of the *citizen* military effort in both world wars. The value of the military in Australian society, argued Soel Encel, lies not in militarism and the professional military caste, but rather in the 'enormous value of being a "returned serviceman"'.<sup>12</sup>

This notion coupled with the Australian soldiers' 'casual if not downright hostile attitude'<sup>13</sup> to the British style of military hierarchy that the Australian army adopted in both world wars only served to reinforced this more 'democratic' view. Many Australian generals of the two world wars only helped to exacerbate this hostile view of the army's leadership. Generals such as James McCay in the First World War and Sir Thomas Blamey and Gordon Bennett in the Second not only 'failed' to perform to the level expected of an Imperial hero, but they also lacked an essential element in the social construction of a 'Hero', the virtues to be a moral exemplar.<sup>14</sup>

With Australian society profoundly affected by the horrific nature of the First World War — ideas on commemoration, memory, and history changed.<sup>15</sup> This meant that the sites of memory for Australia's military commanders did not exist like they once would have if their deeds had been accomplished in the Victorian era in which these men had been raised. It was not that their accomplishments paled in comparison, rather the social importance of these accomplishments were now viewed within an alternative discourse.

Monuments are but one way to measure the heroic ideal; literature another. Traditionally, the writing of military history is normally concerned with strategy and tactics: large battles, manoeuvring armies and with the 'personalities, attainments, and failings of commanders'.<sup>16</sup> However, Bean's deference to the 'ordinary' hero made military history in Australia more 'concerned with the writing from the point of view of the men in the field rather than the staff at G.H.Q.'.<sup>17</sup> What Davison called 'democratic' memorials, Inglis calls

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balanced by tributes to humble angels of mercy (Simpson and his donkey) and both [are] outnumbered many times over by the simple white figures of digger standing to attention'. Just as significantly, the only statues to be found in the gardens of one of our military's premier sites of memory, the Australian War Memorial, are of Simpson and 'Weary Dunlop', another of Davison's so-called 'angels'.

<sup>12</sup> S. Encel, 'The Study of Militarism in Australia', *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 3.1 (1967), 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Brian Fitzpatrick, *The Australian Commonwealth: A Picture of the Community* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1961), p. 209.

<sup>16</sup> Encel, p. 7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 'Other nations make films about their generals; we have films about our privates', p. 13; Jane Ross, *The Myth of the Digger* (Sydney: Southwood Press, 1985).

'democratic war' history.<sup>18</sup> The decisions of generals, the heroes of the Victorian age, became the backdrop for the thousands of individual stories that need to be told at the regimental level. This reflection on the importance of the digger, 'one of the boys' above those in command, was recognized early on — in 1932 the British military historian Captain Basil Liddell Hart wrote of the death of Australia's first Great War VC winner, Albert Jacka that; it attracted greater attention almost than the passing of any famous leaders of 1914–1918 [. . .] The fact may be regarded as significant of the Australian's essential democracy, or perhaps of their superior sense of reality [. . .] his strength, his fearlessness [. . .] and no less his impatience with military red-tape [made him seem] to Australians to represent the character type they most admired, and thus can be taken as their typical and national hero.<sup>19</sup>

Sir Basil Liddell Hart's ideas personify the relationship that had developed between the writing of Australian military history and its commemorative role more generally. This prevailing and dominating form of historical discourse saw Australia's experience in war being recorded from the 'regimental view point'. One of the failings of this approach to Australian military history was that, in effect, it virtually excluded the more orthodox approach that had developed in other western countries such as Great Britain, USA and France. As Ross argues, the 'myth' of the digger failed to integrate the experience of the officer corps and in particular it 'ignores the functions of the highest commanders and staff officers. It is indeed the myth of the fighting private'.<sup>20</sup>

### *The changing landscape*

One of the most significant ways for a society to recognize individual achievement through historical discourse is with biography. However, the consequences of the decline in the cultural connection to Empire in Australia as a result of the First World War, coupled with the pioneering work of the official historian Charles Bean, led to a tradition of remembrance and national memory that was enshrined in egalitarian discourse. This meant that biography, 'the printed equivalent to that other index of celebrity [in Australia], the portrait entered for the Archibald Prize',<sup>21</sup> was, and to some extent still is, an overlooked genre for Australia's military leaders. Despite these arguments it must be acknowledged that there has been some construction of individual heroism and mythology in Australia's military past, and in recent years we have seen some changes in the prevailing discourse. In 1993, at the funeral for Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop, the former Governor General Sir Ninian Stephen said that 'Weary' was a hero in an age when there was a dearth of heroes. 'Of all Australians he

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<sup>18</sup> Inglis, p. 54.

<sup>19</sup> Letter by Captain B.H. Liddell Hart in *Reveille*, 1 May 1931, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> Ross, p. 101.

<sup>21</sup> Stuart Macintyre, 'Biography', *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 72.

shares a lone eminence of sustained heroism'.<sup>22</sup> 'Weary' was a representative of that nation who had lived by a 'simpler, harder code of honour, duty and sacrifice'.<sup>23</sup>

While this signifies noteworthy praise for an individual, Sir Ninian Stephen's comments reaffirm rather than contradict the notion of the egalitarian discourse of the Anzac legend. Weary, a doctor and prisoner of war of the Japanese, fits more easily into the same mode of the archetype symbol of this mythology, Simpson and his Donkey, as opposed to celebrating an Australian Wellington or Nelson. Dunlop and Simpson are celebrated for lives saved and endurance of the human spirit rather than great victories won. Yet at the time of Dunlop's funeral the nature of Australian army biography was changing. The expansion in this field pointed to some important issues about the way in which Australian's redefined their notions of the past and who, within Australia's history, 'deserves' recognition. Previously these soldiers<sup>24</sup> have been left off monuments, overlooked in post-war historiography and often 'forgotten' in many ways by the broader community.

While it has been argued that 'some modern biographers have been described as quick in pursuit of the dead', the same could not be said for Australian military biography.<sup>25</sup> As late as the early 1990s academics could point to the poor nature of Australian military biography.<sup>26</sup> When compiling material for his book *The Commanders*, David Horner complained of the relatively small number of historians working in the field of Australia's high-ranking military officers and how this was further restricted by the 'lack of analysis'.<sup>27</sup> Horner has also noted that the greatest restriction to the publication of high-quality Australian army biographies has been a lack of capable biographers.<sup>28</sup> Australia's first genuine military biography did not appear until 1954, covering predictably Australia's only Field Marshall, Sir Thomas Blamey. In 1957 Charles Bean published *Two Men I knew*, on General William Bridges and Brudenell White. W.B. Russell wrote a biography of the Second World War General Stanley Savige in 1959, and the 1960s produced only one biography, Frank Legge's study of the infamous Lieutenant General Gordon Bennett. Both Russell and

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<sup>22</sup> Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, p. 2. On page 22 Davison also talks of the decline in the resistance to hero-worship in more general terms in Australia during the 1990s.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Clark, 'Exploring the History of the Australian Army Through Biography'. In the forty-one titles of military biography in Australia represented by Chris Clark's criteria, so far only one has a woman as its subject.

<sup>25</sup> Brenda Nile, 'Burying Caesar; To Illuminate, Celebrate or Denigrate — the Biographer's Dilemma', *Australian Author* (Summer 1991), p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> David Horner, 'Australian Military History in the 1980's: Genres, Military Biography', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 19 (November 1991), 25. The National Library of Australia's online catalogue lists 177 books under the subject heading 'Soldiers — Australia — Biography'. This category, however, does include texts with biography chapters or sections as opposed to full biographical studies. The subject heading 'Generals — Australia — Biography' lists eighty titles, although this does include 'Governors-General' in its search findings.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> David Horner, 'Australian Military Biography', in *Ranging Shots: New Directions in Australian Military History*, ed. by Carl Bridge, The Sir Robert Menzies Centre for Australian Studies, Institute of Commonwealth Studies (University of London, 1998).

Legge's works provide solid foundation investigations of their subject but both fall well short of a systematic study of their subjects as senior commanders.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the production of only eight titles, many of these re-examined existing biographies, however new editions were made covering the three other most prominent Australian military men, Generals Leslie Morshead, John Monash, and Harry Chauvel. The later two biographies, *John Monash: A Biography* by the academic historian Geoffrey Serle, and *Chauvel of the Light Horse* by Alec Hill remain two the most thorough and insightful biographies of Australian commanders ever written, yet the 1976 work on Morshead is largely unsatisfactory.<sup>29</sup>

### *The tertiary sector*

While the dominance of the Bean-inspired orthodoxy in Australian military history is one major reason that military biography has not been a popular genre in Australia, a lack of interest in our nation's military past within the Australian university system has been another.<sup>30</sup> The lack of interest shown by the tertiary system can be attributed to the rise in post-war university education in Australia, coinciding with the political and social backlash against the Vietnam War.<sup>31</sup> As Joan Beaumont argues:

For the majority of academics in the humanities and social sciences, opposition to conscription became almost 'de rigueur'. War was almost instinctively seen as a morally suspect activity. To this must be added the impact of the shift within the historical discipline from political to social, cultural and women's history [. . .] it also brought with it a critique of war as a gendered activity, reinforcing the stereotypical roles of men and women, and subordinating the powerless in society to the will of the hegemonic State.<sup>32</sup>

These factors and 'the leftist tradition which allegedly characterised many aspects of Australian intellectual life' meant that academia was 'inimical to the serious study of war and the military'.<sup>33</sup> Beaumont has gone on to argue that the 'shift in recent decades from

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<sup>29</sup> John Hetherington, *Blamey* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1954); C.E.W. Bean, *Two Men I Knew: William Bridges and Brudenell White, Fathers of the AIF* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1954); W.B. Russell, *There Goes a Man: The Biography of Sir Stanley G. Savage* (London: Longmans, 1959); Frank Legge, *Gordon Bennett Story* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1965); John Moore, *Morshead: A Biography of Lieutenant General Sir Leslie Morshead* (Sydney: Haldane, 1976); Alec Hill, *Chauvel of the Light Horse* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1978); G. Serle, *John Monash: A Biography* (Melbourne: MUP, 1982).

<sup>30</sup> Joan Beaumont, 'The State of Australian Defence Force History', *Australian Defence: Sources and Statistics*, vi, The Australian Centenary History of Defence (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7; J. Beaumont, 'The State of Australian History of War', *Australian Historical Studies*, 121 (2003), 166.

<sup>31</sup> Beaumont, 'The State of Australian Defence Force History', p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> 'Military History and Historians', ed. by Peter Dennis, *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 397.

“epistemology to ethics” has also done nothing to encourage broad historical interest in Australia’s military history’.<sup>34</sup> It is little wonder, then, that the lives of our military leaders attracted little interest amongst the intellectual elite during this period. Indeed, almost all of these early biographies were written by former military men or, in the case of Hetherington and Bean, wartime correspondents.<sup>35</sup>

### *The 1990s and beyond*

In contrast to the poor output of the 1970s and 1980s, sixteen military biographies appeared in the following decade. However, as Chris Clark highlights, ‘while this growth appears healthy, it is probable that most fields of publishing have experienced similar or better rates of expansion over the same period’.<sup>36</sup> Eighteen more biographies have appeared since 2000<sup>37</sup> and, despite Clark’s caveat, this does represent a considerable expansion in the genre. Some of this newfound enthusiasm for the genre can be attributable to the changing patterns of commemoration relating to Australia’s military history since the time of Weary Dunlop’s death. Yet, despite the rise in output, the quality of these works has varied greatly and the genre still suffers from a lack of capable biographers.

During this period there was been a significant reappraisal of a number of the issues surrounding Australia’s military past that allowed for a broader historical discourse. Most significantly, from the mid-1980s Australian society began to change its attitudes to the

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<sup>34</sup> Beaumont, ‘The State of Australian History of War’, p. 166.

<sup>35</sup> However, arguably the best biography of an Australian military leader was *John Monash: A Biography*, written by an academic, Dr Geoffrey Serle AO; editor of the *ADB* 1975–1988 and winner of Ernest Scott prize, the National Book Council Banjo award, and the ‘Age’ Book of the Year. He represents, however, the proverbial ‘exception rather than the rule’.

<sup>36</sup> Clark, ‘Exploring the History of the Australian Army Through Biography’.

<sup>37</sup> Peter S. Sadler, *The Paladin: A Life of Major-General Sir John Gellibrand* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000); David Coombes, *Morshead: Hero of Tobruk and El Alamein* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2001); Anne Blair, *Ted Serong: The Life of an Australian Counter-Insurgency Expert* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002); Christopher Wray, *Sir James Whiteside McCay: A Turbulent Life* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2002); Ross McMullin, *Pompey Elliott* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2002); Steve Eather, *Desert Sands, Jungle Lands: A Biography of Major General Ken Eather* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003); Stuart Braga, *Kokoda Commander: A Life of Major-General ‘Tubby’ Allen* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2004); Roland Perry, *Monash: The Outsider who Won a War* (Sydney: Random House, 2004); Robert Likeman, *From Law to War: The Life of Brigadier General Lachlan Wilson of the Light Horse* (Victoria: Slouch Hat Publications, 2004); Gavin Keating, *The Right Man for the Right Job: Lieutenant General Sir Stanley Savage as a Military Commander* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2005); David Horner, *Strategic Command: General Sir John Wilton and Australia’s Asian Wars* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2005); Kevin Baker, *Paul Cullen, Citizen and Soldier: The Life and Times of Major-General Paul Cullen AC, CBE, DSO and Bar, ED, FCA* (Sydney: Rosenberg, 2005); Rex S. Kirkham, *From ‘Nasho’ to ‘Major General’: The Remarkable Life of Maj-Gen. Rodney Fay, 1933–1998* (Yeronga: R. Kirkham, 2005); Patricia Lonsdale, *Colonel Lionel Rose: Chief Veterinary Officer of the Northern Territory 1946–1958* (Rockhampton: Central Queensland University Press, 2006); James Wood, *Chiefs of the Australian Army: Higher Command of the Australian Military Forces, 1901–1914* (Loftus: Australian Military History Publications, 2006); David Coombes, *The Lionheart: A Life of Lieutenant General Sir Talbot Hobbs* (Loftus: Australian Military History Publications, 2007); Patrick Lindsay, *Cosgrove: Portrait of a Leader* (Sydney: Random House, 2007); Andrew Faulkner, *Arthur Blackburn, VC: An Australian Hero, his Men, and their Two World Wars* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2009).

experiences of war and in particular the Second World War.<sup>38</sup> During the 1990s Australia saw the development of what Joan Beaumont has described as the 'memory industry'.<sup>39</sup> This was a period when Australian historians were rediscovering the campaigns of the Second World War. Newspapers used the anniversaries of Australia's great battles to boost sales with special supplements and reflections on the nation's military past, while politicians sought out their own very public pilgrimages to the battlefields, using them to praise the Anzac ethos and to articulate their own political views of Australian history.<sup>40</sup>

This change in the nature of remembrance and commemoration occurred throughout Australian society and has been coupled with a weakened resistance to the 'great man' ideal.<sup>41</sup> Although never to be remembered and revered as heroes in the Victorian era manner in they were raised, the surge in biography and the declining resistance to figures of national prominence makes it easy to see why there would be an expansion in the field of Australian army biography. Of course, there exists a considerably limited timeframe for the investigation of Australia's military past. This has placed restrictions on military biography, principally through the premise that most biographies are only written after their subjects have passed away. However, this short period of time has been offset by Australia's involvement in a large number of the major conflicts of the twentieth century and the increasing knowledge of the notions of conflict on the colonial frontier. Nevertheless, nowhere in Australian history was it more evident that the role of the high-ranking individual remained in the backwaters of historical inquiry than in the area of military history. This is a notion that has only seriously been challenged in the last ten years.

### *Writing and publishing*

One of the most important developments in this area has been the escalating interest of the professional historian. As noted earlier, the emergence of universal tertiary education in Australia coinciding with a backlash to Australia's commitment to the Vietnam War resulted in the virtual rejection of military history amongst academic historians. However, John McQuilton contends that same turbulent decades saw a redefinition rather than a rejection

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<sup>38</sup> Beaumont, 'The State of Australian Defence Force History', p. 7.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Inglis, p. 407. Worthy of note are Paul Keating's visit to Kokoda, John Howard's visits to Gallipoli, and currently Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's walking of the Kokoda track while leader of the opposition.

<sup>41</sup> For instance, the Vietnam Veterans' welcome home march, the Australia Remembers Campaign, the entombment of the unknown soldier, and the media hype surrounding our last Anzac Alec Campbell — see Jonathan King, *Gallipoli; Our Last Man Standing; The Extraordinary life of Alec Campbell* (Milton, QLD: John Wiley & Sons, 2003); 'The Last Anzac: One Man's Death Signals End of an Era', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 May 2002; 'Wollongong Mourns Icon', *Illawarra Mercury*, 25 May 2002; 'Farewell Digger, We'll Miss You', *Sun-Herald*, 19 May 2002; 'More than an Anzac', *SMH*, 18 May 2002; 'In an Old Soldier's End is our Beginning', *The Age*, 21 May 2002 Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History*, p. 25.

of our country's military history. McQuilton believes that the opposition to conscription during the Vietnam War period was an event that 'sparked renewed academic interest in military history'.<sup>42</sup> But in the university context the focus of discussion had shifted: the concern was not with tactics and strategy, but with social and cultural experiences of war. The home front and the lives of ordinary men and women became the major battlefields of post-Second World War military history.

This meant that 'military history was no longer the province of the soldier alone; it also belonged to his family, his community and his nation'.<sup>43</sup> Since the 1960s this has led to a 'richness of Australian writing on war' that has included not only traditional military history, but work on the Anzac legend and mythology, the victims of war, the POW experience, civilian internees, battlefield pilgrimage, and the gendered nature of war, to name but a few.<sup>44</sup>

This 'war and society' approach has also dominated the teaching of Australian military history in the university system. However, despite this more 'acceptable' model of viewing our military past and the popularity of military history amongst students,<sup>45</sup> its study remains an area of limited interest to academic historians.<sup>46</sup> This 'lack of interest' amongst the academic community is some what 'remarkable' given the fact that Australians consistently view war as 'central to national ritual and political culture'.<sup>47</sup> A direct consequence of this neglect was the continuation of the biographies of the 1970s and 1980s being written by historians without formal academic training.

These decades did, however, see the emergence of an increasing number of historians who combine a military background with academic training. These include Professor David Horner and Dr Chris Clark.<sup>48</sup> The 1990s and beyond has heralded a further shift towards the more professionally minded academic historian. Indicative of this newfound awareness was the submission and publication of biographical PhD dissertations of Australian military commanders. These include Brett Lodge's *Lavarack: Rival General* (UNSW, ADFA), John Bentley, *Champion of Anzac: General Sir Brudenell White, the First Australian Imperial Force and the Emergence of the Australian Military Culture 1914–18* (University of Wollongong), David Coombes, *Morshead: Hero of Tobruk and El Alamein* (Sydney University), and Peter J.

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<sup>42</sup> John McQuilton, 'Teaching "Military History" in Academe', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 19 (November 1991), 33.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Beaumont, 'The State of Australian History of War', pp. 165–66; Jeffery Grey, 'Writing About War and the Military in Australia', *Australian Historical Studies*, 121 (2003), 385.

<sup>45</sup> Beaumont, 'The State of Australian History of War', p. 165.

<sup>46</sup> Dennis, p. 398; Beaumont, 'The State of Australian History of War', p. 167.

<sup>47</sup> Beaumont, 'The State of Australian History of War', p. 168.

<sup>48</sup> Professor David Horner (RMC graduate 1969 and Vietnam Veteran) and Dr Chris Clark (RMC graduate, 1972).

Dean, *The Making of a General: Lost Years, Forgotten Battles: Lieutenant General Frank Berryman 1894–1941* (UNSW).<sup>49</sup>

Arguably one of the most significant developments in military biography in recent years has been the establishment of the *Australian Army History Series*. This series supported by the Army History Unit (AHU) and initially Oxford, now Cambridge, University Press and under the editorship of Professor David Horner has devoted a section of the series to the publication of biographies. The series has produced eleven biographies. The First World War has been represented by Christopher Wray's *Sir James Whiteside McCay*, and arguably one of the best biographies of the series Peter S. Sadler's *The Paladin: The Life of Major-General Sir John Gellibrand*.<sup>50</sup> Second World War biographies include Lodge and Coombes' works, David Horner's balanced and perceptive work, *Blamey: The Commander in Chief*, Bill Edgar's *Warrior of Kokoda: A Biography of Brigadier Arnold Potts*, Gavin Keating's insightful *Right Man for the Right Job: Lieutenant General Sir Stanley Savige as a Military Commander*, and Stuart Braga's passionate yet subjective work *Kokoda Commander: A Life of Major-General 'Tubby' Allen*.<sup>51</sup> The first post-Second World War title, Anne Blair's *Ted Serong: The Life of an Australian Counter-Insurgency Expert*, appeared in 2002, followed shortly afterwards by David Horner's *Strategic Command: General Sir John Wilton and Australia's Asian Wars*.<sup>52</sup> Released in 2005, Horner's latest biography is of the highest quality and provides an excellent account of both Wilton's personality and his military career. This work is also significant in that it provides an insight into the highest levels of strategic command in the Cold War era, a topic area that has received limited attention.

The AHU series is also representative of the changing nature of military history and in particular military biography. This series is representative of the increasing academic and professional interest in this field. Series editor David Horner is the Professor of Australian Defence History at the Strategic Defence Studies Centre, ANU, Dr Anne Blair is a research associate at the National Centre for Australian Studies at Monash University, David Coombes and Brett Lodge hold PhDs in History, Peter Sadler is an ex-army officer with an Honours degree in history from ANU, Gavin Keating is a serving military officer whose book started out as his honours dissertation in history at the University of New South Wales (Australian Defence Force Academy), Michael B. Tyquin is a graduate of both Melbourne

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<sup>49</sup> Grey, 'Writing About War and the Military in Australia', p. 385. Here Grey talks about their being 'no shortage of graduate students waiting to write a thesis in the area' (military history).

<sup>50</sup> The AHU has also produced biographies of Lieutenant General Sir Talbot Hobbs, Lieutenant General Sir Carl Herman Jess, Major-General Rupert Downes 1885–1945, and Brigadier-General William Glasgow from this period by their second-tier publishing house, Australian Military History Publications.

<sup>51</sup> The AHU has also produced a biography of Brigadier John Rogers, *Winning With Intelligence* (2000) produced by their second-tier publishing house, Australian Military History Publications.

<sup>52</sup> The AHU has also produced a biography of General Sir Francis Hasset, a battalion commander in the Korean War, and *The Fight Leaders: A Study of Australian Battlefield Leadership Green, Ferguson and Hasset*, from this period by their second-tier publishing house, Australian Military History Publications. The later title is not a biography but demonstrates how a non-conventional approach to the study of individual commanders can be used, especially at the level of battalion command.

and Monash universities, Bill Edgar is the archivist/curator at Hale School in Perth, WA, and Christopher Wray, the most unlikely historian of the group, is a lawyer at McCay & Thwaites, the law firm started by his biography subject, James Whiteside McCay.

The authors of this series are representative of the long overdue expansion of professional interest in Australian army biography. Despite its significant contribution to the publication of army biography the AHU series does not have a monopoly. In 2002 Scribe Publications released an excellent biography of Brigadier 'Pompey' Elliot by another academic historian, Ross McMullin.<sup>53</sup> This newfound dominance by the 'academic' community has also not been absolute, as demonstrated by the release of Steve Eather's *Desert Sands and Jungle Lands: A biography of Major-General Ken Eather*,<sup>54</sup> and Andrew Faulkner's *Arthur Blackburn, VC*, the genre still attracts a large number of freelance and amateur historians.<sup>55</sup>

The academic nature of the AHU's Oxford/Cambridge publications are further supplemented by the major commercial publishing houses such as Allen & Unwin, Scribe and Rosenberg, and the smaller independent companies: Slouch Hat Publications and Australian Military History Publications. These publishing houses have produced a number of titles including biographies of Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Honner, Brigadier John Rogers, and Lieutenant General Carl Jess.<sup>56</sup> Although many of these titles lack the sophisticated analysis of the AHU's premier series, these works do help us to 'explore the totality of human experience' for Australians at war.<sup>57</sup> Nor has, in recent years, military biography been exclusively restricted to a concern of men, military or otherwise. Traditional military history has been 'strongly empirical, theoretically unadventurous, and — literally for millennia — a masculine domain'.<sup>58</sup> The changing nature of Australian scholarship in recent years has, however, seen a number of female authors enter the field, including Phoebe Vincent's *My Darling Mick: The Life of Granville Ryrie* (1997), Colleen McCullough's biography of Roden Cutler (1998), Judy Thomson's *Winning with Intelligence; A Biography of*

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<sup>53</sup> Ross McMullin, *Pompey Elliot* (Carlton: Scribe, 2002).

<sup>54</sup> Steve Eather, *Desert Sands and Jungle Lands: A Biography of Major-General Ken Eather* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003).

<sup>55</sup> Beaumont, 'The State of Australian History of War', p. 168. See also footnote 34 for list of titles and publishers

from 2000 onwards. Jeffery Grey has also noted recently that 'Australian military history is being colonized by journalists [. . .] The trend has spread to military biography as well [. . .] [the] great majority [of these works] add absolutely nothing to the sum of what we know about their subjects, but to point this out as an academic historian invites accusations of sour grapes, or injured self-interest'. Jeffrey Grey, review of *Arthur Blackburn, VC: An Australian Hero, His Men, and Their Two World Wars*, by Andrew Faulkner, *Journal of Historical Biography*, 4 (Autumn 2008), 151–53, <www.ufv.ca/jhb>. Accessed 12 January 2009.

<sup>56</sup> Peter Brune, *We Band of Brothers: A Biography of Ralph Honner — Soldier and Statesman* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000); Judy Thompson, *Winning with Intelligence: A Biography of Brigadier John Rogers* (Loftus: Australian Military History Publications, 2000); Ron Austin, *A Soldier's Soldier: The Life of Lt-General Carl Hermann Jess* (McCrae: Slouch Hat Publications, 2001).

<sup>57</sup> John Rickard, 'Biography in Australia', *Canberra Historical Journal*, 18 (1986), 18.

<sup>58</sup> Beaumont, 'The State of Australian History of War', p. 165.

*Brigadier John David Rogers, CBE, MC, 1895–1978* (2000), and Anne Blair's study of Brigadier Ted Serong (2000).<sup>59</sup>

But, as Joan Beaumont declares, the majority of female historians research them 'social history of war, gender studies and memory [. . .] rarely interface[ing] with those working in the more traditional operational and strategic studies — generally male[s]'.<sup>60</sup> This view is ever present in the approach to army biography that the majority of the female authors have taken. Phoebe Vincent's biography of Major-General Granville Ryrie is more of 'an affectionate account of Ryrie's life and character written around [. . .] his letters [. . .] to his "Darling Mick" [his wife]'. The book passes up the opportunity to detail many aspects of 'Ryrie's military career'.<sup>61</sup>

Craig Wilcox argues that Vincent is, in fact, 'not the author to assess Ryrie's military ability'. Wilcox quite rightly goes on to state that Vincent finds it difficult to provide a balanced perspective on Ryrie or the ability to 'judge her hero harshly', even when his actions deem this to be warranted. The book makes more of a valuable contribution to an understanding of the man and 'his now vanished society'.<sup>62</sup>

Colleen McCullough is much better known as an author of fiction than history and her foray into biography is much more concerned with the broader life of her subject than the military events which made him initially famous. McCullough's work leaves room for only one chapter covering the Second World War, but this is more in keeping with the fact that she is not writing, strictly speaking, a military history and never had pretension to do so. McCullough's biography is, as such, atypical of most biographies of Australian Victoria Cross winners.

Both Anne Blair and Judy Thomson struggle to cross the divide that Joan Beaumont sees as separating social and operation military history, and female and male historians.<sup>63</sup> While Anne Blair's work falls short of bridging this gap, this is due more to the fact that her subject, Ted Serong, did not hold a position of senior operational command. For Thomson, however, Brigadier Roger's role as head of Australia's military intelligence during the Second World War provides a fascinating subject for investigation. But, while the biography provides an adequate coverage of his military career, it falls well short of a providing detailed analysis of the role that military intelligence played in the Australian army during the war. There could be a number of reasons for this shortfall, but perhaps Thomson was

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<sup>59</sup> Phoebe Vincent, *My Darling Mick: The Life of Granville Ryrie* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1997); Colleen McCullough, *Roden Cutler, V.C.* (Milsons Point: Random House, 1998); Judy Thomson *Winning with Intelligence; A Biography of Brigadier John David Rogers, CBE, MC, 1895–1978* (Loftus: Australian Military History Publications, 2000).

<sup>60</sup> Beaumont, 'The State of Australian History of War', p. 167.

<sup>61</sup> Craig Wilcox, 'Book Review: *My Darling Mick: The Life of Granville Ryrie 1865–1937*', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 37 (October 1997).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Beaumont, 'The State of Australian Defence Force History', p. 138.

more interested in providing an insight into the life of her father than an analysis of the role of operational and strategic intelligence. Biography, arguably a subjective undertaking, can be compromised by this type of intimate personal involvement.

### *Worthy of selection?*

The change in outlook towards the biography and the military in the 1990s did not lead to a universal re-evaluation of the genre. The uneven nature of this reassessment is most apparent in the selection of biographical subjects. In spite of the changes in the discipline, a substantial gap has developed in the genre, centred on the prevailing orthodoxy of Australia's senior 'commanders'. As a result there still exists a large number of significant figures whose role in the historiography of Australian military history remains relatively 'undiscovered'.

If Stuart Macintyre suggests that biography is a 'window to celebrity', then the military officers who grace the red carpet of Australian army biography are easily recognizable as belonging to three very distinct military categories. The first of these are the Victoria Cross winners. A second, and far more prolific field of military biography, focuses on the 'commanders' and the third and smallest of these categories are the 'founding fathers' of Australia's army.

The Victoria Cross winners are men who have performed deeds of the most valiant kind in the service of their nation. For many of these biographies, including Collen McCullough's *Roden Cutler, VC*, the military service of their subjects is but a brief part of a career and life 'largely spent elsewhere'.<sup>64</sup> These studies, given the nature of their military experiences and their junior ranks in the military hierarchy, follow a more mainstream biographical tradition and, as David Horner has pointed out, 'like stories by low-ranking servicemen, they provide much local colour, but usually don't contribute much to a wider historical understanding'.<sup>65</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the most prolific of candidates for biography are the past senior commanders of Australia's army during the two world wars. More often than not the biography of a senior military officer does not follow the conventional biographical pattern of simply recording an individual's life. As David Horner points out, with the exception of 'all other professions except medicine the profession of arms requires the practitioners to be successful on every occasion when put to the test',<sup>66</sup> and it is upon this maxim, the evaluation and judgement of their major military commands, that these biographies rest.

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<sup>64</sup> Clark, 'Exploring the History of the Australian Army Through Biography'.

<sup>65</sup> Horner, 'Australian Military Biographies'.

<sup>66</sup> Horner, 'Australian Military History in the 1980's: Genres, Military Biography', p. 23.

Although these biographies must investigate the nature of their subject, they are concerned primarily with evaluating and judging performance.<sup>67</sup>

These commanders are generally the names that are familiar to many Australians and often linked to great battles or campaigns. They include General Sir John Monash and the battles of 1918, General Sir Henry Chauvel and the Light Horse in Palestine and the Middle East, Major General Gordon Bennet and the fall of Singapore, Field Marshal Thomas Blamey and the Kokoda and Pacific campaigns, and Lieutenant General Leslie Morshead at Tobruk and El Alamein. These men, the 'Big Five' of Australian military history, along with the several other generals that can be classified as senior 'commanders' dominate the genre of military biography.<sup>68</sup> Like studies of the Victoria Cross winners, they embrace and reinforce the traditional ideas of the hero or the 'great man'. But they represent only a small proportion of the individuals of 'significance' who have contributed to Australian military history.

By way of contrast to the 'commanders', Generals Gordon Legge, William Bridges, and Brudenell White are more intricately entwined with that far less glamorous occupation of the military 'staff'. These three officers, while having some command experience, especially in the case of Bridges and Legge, are more widely remembered for their roles in establishing the military in Australia. Legge was the controversial leader of the nationalist faction amongst the pre-war First World War military staff.

He helped draft Australia's initial military regulations under the *Defence Act (1903)* and was Chief of the General Staff (CGS) 1914–1916 and 1917–1920. Bridge's prominence stems from his role in the establishment of the Royal Military College of Australia at Duntroon (RMC) and his death at the head of the first Australian Division at Gallipoli, which he had raised and trained. White's contribution comes through his excellence as a staff officer during the First World War. Selected as Chief of Staff for the first Division, AIF, under Bridges, White went on to hold this post for the first Anzac Corps (1916–1917) and later for various British armies under Lieutenant General Birdwood.<sup>69</sup>

These 'categories' are not in themselves comprehensive. Obviously, not all Victoria Cross winners are honoured with a military biography. In some cases their awards were posthumous and often their wartime experiences represent only one limited aspect of their lives. Conversely, the 'commanders' are significantly under explored in other aspects of their lives.

While the major Australian commanders have at least one biography, and some a number, this sub-genre has developed from the top down. It seems that, for the most part, the higher the rank the more likely it is that they have received the attention of a biographer.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>68</sup> They account for approximately 60%+ of the titles surveyed.

<sup>69</sup> See also James Wood, *Chiefs of the Australian Army: Higher Command of the Australian Military Forces, 1901–1914* (Loftus: Australian Military History Publications, 2006).

From the First World War, Australia's first corps commander Lieutenant General Harry Chauvel has been covered by Alec Hill's excellent *Chauvel of the Light Horse*, while General John Monash, the Australian Corps Commander on the Western Front, has received the attention of no less than six biographers.<sup>70</sup>

Most of the Australian Divisional commanders from this war, including James McCay, Gordon Legge, William Bridges, and John Gellibrand, have also rated a biography. Australia's most senior military officer and only Field Marshal, Sir Thomas Blamey, has also received three biographies, the latest being David Horner's perceptive appraisal of Blamey as a military commander. The principal corps commanders of the Second World War — John Lavarack, Stanley Savige, Edmund Herring, Iven Mackay, and Leslie Morshead — have all received the attention of a biography. Another, Sydney Rowell, has published an autobiography and was covered in David Horner's book *The Commanders*.<sup>71</sup> A biography of the only remaining Second World War corps commander, Lieutenant General Frank Berryman, is due for release through the AHU series in 2010.<sup>72</sup>

At the divisional command level Generals George Vasey, Gordon Bennett, Arthur Allen, and Horace Robertson have all have had a published work which covers their military career.<sup>73</sup> But biographies are yet to appear of the 9th Division's General George Wootten, the commander of the Australian forces at Milne Bay, General Cyril Clowes, as well as Generals E.J. 'Teddy' Milford, Jack Stevens, and William Bridgeford. The last three may have fought 'competent but less spectacular campaigns', but this does not mean that they do not warrant proper historical attention, particularly given that their contribution to Australian history has not been restricted to just one campaign.

Investigations of Australian 'commanders' by historians need also to move well beyond the level of the divisional command and this is where the 'big gap' in the genre now exists.<sup>74</sup> During the Second World War, especially in the Pacific campaigns, the most prominent combat formation was not the army, corps, or division, but the brigade. Here only Brigadier Arnold Potts, Iven Doughery, and Ken Eather have received attention. This command level provides great opportunities for military historians and there is a vast number of worthy

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<sup>70</sup> See R. Brasch, *Sir John Monash* (Sydney: R. Brasch, 1966); John Hetherington, *John Monash* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1962); Alan Smithers, *John Monash* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973); G. Serle, *John Monash: A Biography*, Melbourne (Melbourne University Press in association with Monash University, 1982); Peter Pedersen, *Monash as Military Commander* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1985); Roland Perry, *Monash: The Outsider Who Won a War: A Biography of Australia's Greatest Military Commander* (Milsons Point: Random House, 2004).

<sup>71</sup> *The Commanders: Australian Military Leadership in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by David Horner (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984).

<sup>72</sup> The author is currently undertaking a biography of Lieutenant General Frank Berryman, due for release with the AHU through Cambridge University Press in 2010.

<sup>73</sup> Horner's work on Vasey is not strictly a biography and room definitely exists here for a full scale biographical appraisal.

<sup>74</sup> David Horner, review of *Arthur Blackburn, VC: An Australian Hero, His Men, and Their Two World Wars*, by Andrew Faulkner, *Australian Historical Studies*, 40.1 (March 2009), 124.

subjects available, Brigadiers Selwyn Porter and Victor Windeyer to name only two. Ross McMullin's biography of Brigadier 'Pompey' Elliot has demonstrated the worthiness of the investigation of this level of command during the First World War, as has the recent work of Andrew Faulkner whose *Arthur Blackburn, VC: An Australian Hero, His Men, and Their Two World Wars* makes a solid contribution to the genre, even though it suffers from many of the problems that are reflective of the journalist-historian.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, there have been limited investigations of the Australia's post-war conflicts. During Australia's military commitments to Korea and Vietnam the brigade formed the highest level of operational command during these conflicts. There are only three biographies covering the post-war period, and one of these, Anne Blair's *Ted Serong*, does not encompass an investigation of a senior officer in an operational command.<sup>76</sup> Potential biographies must, however, consider a number of factors before embarking on research. Significantly, a number of the officers mentioned above do not have private papers, and publishers are not always forthcoming with lesser known subjects. However, these difficulties should not be viewed as to constraining.

Many biographers have overcome the difficulties posed by limited resources to produce high quality work, such as Jeffery Grey's biography of Major General Horace Robertson, and the AHU and smaller commercial publishing houses such as Australian Military History Publications and Slouch Hat Publications are continually on the lookout for new material. Of course, not all military biographies fit neatly into these categories and this is a measure of the versatility of the discipline. The broad nature of the field shows the ever-expanding styles of military biography that have emerged in recent years. For example, Peter Brune's *We Band of Brothers* presents a fascinating depiction of the life of junior officer and battalion commander, Ralph Honner, during the Second World War.<sup>77</sup> Included amongst these titles are Ebury's study of wartime doctor and prisoner-of-war 'Weary' Dunlop, Ingle's survey of Lieutenant William Dawkins' time on Gallipoli in *From Duntroon to the Dardanelles*, Anne Blair's work on Ted Serong, Australia's counter-insurgency expert during the Vietnam War, and Jonathan King's *Gallipoli: Our Last Man Standing: The Extraordinary Life of Alec Campbell*.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> See Jeffrey Grey, review of *Arthur Blackburn, VC: An Australian Hero, His Men, and Their Two World Wars*, by Andrew Faulkner, *Journal of Historical Biography*, 4 (Autumn 2008), 151–53, <[www.ufv.ca/jhb](http://www.ufv.ca/jhb)>. Accessed 12 January 2009; see also Horner, review of *Arthur Blackburn*, pp. 123–24.

<sup>76</sup> See D. Bulter, A. Argent and J. Shelton, *The Fighting Leader: Australian Battlefield Leadership — Green, Hasset & Fergusons* (Loftus: AMHP, 2002). This book investigates the leaders of three 3RAR CO's during the Korean War and as such is a tactical study not a biography. John Essex-Clark, *Hasset: Australian Leader: A Biography of General Sir Francis Hasset* (Loftus: Australian Military History Publications, 2005).

<sup>77</sup> Peter Brune, *We Band of Brothers: A Biography of Ralph Honner, Soldier and Statesman* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 2000).

<sup>78</sup> Sue Ebury, *Weary: The Life of Sir Edward Dunlop* (Ringwood: Viking, 1997); Judith Ingle, *From Duntroon to the Dardanelles: A Biography of Lieutenant William Dawkins: Including his Diaries and Selected Letters* (Canberra: J. Ingle, 1995).

With the exception of Anne Blair's *To the Bitter End*, all of the above-mentioned titles are apart of that 'vast amount of Australian defence history [that] is written, not by academics, but [. . .] [by] those outside the academy'<sup>79</sup> and, although none of these titles fall into the three categories mentioned above, collectively and individually they represent a significant broadening of our understanding of Australia's military past. These areas outside the mainstream 'orthodoxy' of army biography are dominated by the non-professional historian, as was military biography in general from the 1950s to the 1980s. Perhaps they, too, warrant greater attention from academia.

### *'Forgotten men, forgotten women'*

For all the achievements of army biography, in particular during the last decade, there remains a large number of men (and women) whose achievements are yet to be remembered. While there exists great scope to broaden our understanding through studies of individuals who remain 'undiscovered' within the existing categories (such as the commanders), there also remains a large segment of our military past that is yet to receive the attention that they deserve. These are the 'forgotten' men and women of Australia's military past.

Women in particular have been neglected. Only two biographies, William's and Goodman's study of Jane Bell OBE, and N.G. Manners, *Bullwinkel*, rank amongst the title's surveyed.<sup>80</sup> Their contribution is further limited by the intensely masculine nature of warfare in the twentieth century; however, their exploits in a vast array of our wartime military efforts demand recognition beyond the current pitiful state. Given that this particular field has, and continues to be, extremely limited, what is needed to enhance the recognition of the experiences of women in wartime is a broadening of our definition of this section of the genre. We should move beyond the traditional confines of the military to include not just members of the armed forces, but associated and affiliated organizations and institutions. This would hopefully help bridge the vast gap that exists in the chronicling of Australian women at war.

While the under-representation of women is considerable, one of the largest and most prominent of the 'forgotten classes' is that of the Army's high-ranking staff officers. These are officers whose military contributions were in the area of logistics, organization and structure, operational planning, and intelligence. These are officers whose high-ranking command experience has not been viewed as either extensive or significant. Only limited

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<sup>79</sup> Beaumont, 'The State of Australian War History', p. 168.

<sup>80</sup> Jennifer A. Williams and Rupert D. Goodman, *Jane Bell OBE (1873–1959) Lady Superintendent, the Royal Melbourne Hospital (1910–1934)* (Richmond: Spectrum Publications for the Royal Melbourne Hospital Graduate Nurses' Association, 1988); Norman G. Manners, *Bullwinkel: The True Story of Vivian Bullwinkel, a Young Army Nursing Sister, Who Was the Sole Survivor of a World War Two Massacre by the Japanese* (Carlisle: Hesperian Press, 2000).

work has been done in this area: Judy Thompson's biography of Brigadier John Rogers, *Winning with Intelligence* about Australia's wartime intelligence chief, and Ron Austin's *Soldier's Soldier: The Life of Lt-General Carl Herman Jess*.<sup>81</sup> Interestingly, both titles were written by freelance amateur historians and unfortunately they both fail to provide the necessary level of detailed analysis that their subjects deserve.

These staff officers lack the glamour and controversy of the 'commanders', and their contributions, which often had direct bearing on operations, are generally overlooked. The majority of these officers served during the Second World War. They were largely permanent officers who rose through the officer ranks and combined both combat leadership and military staff work. Moreover, many of these men also made significant contributions to post-war Australian society through the public service, diplomatic posts, and private enterprise. They were very much political creatures and this aspect of their service has been largely disregarded.

There are a considerable number of these high-ranking staff officers who are yet to receive the attention of a biographer. For example, Major General Leslie Beavis, a regular officer and RMC graduate, made a significant contribution to the Australian military. During the Second World War he was Director of Ordnance Middle East before returning to Australia as Master-General of Ordnance in 1942. His control and reforms of the ordnance branch played a central role in organizing the Australian military during the Second World War and he exercised substantial influence in the professionalization of the Army. Furthermore, he played a prominent role in the establishment of the long-range weapons facility at Woomera in the post-war period. He was a member and sometimes chair of a number of Department of Defence Committees up to 1952.<sup>82</sup>

Major General William Bridgeford is another prominent military officer to fall into this category. A fellow RMC graduate with Beavis during the Second World War, he held the positions of Commander 25th Infantry Brigade, Quartermaster General 1<sup>st</sup> Australian Army, and GOC 3rd Division 1944–1945. In the post-war period he was appointed to the re-established Military Board and later was Quartermaster General, and Commander in Chief British Commonwealth Occupation Force Japan. After his military career he was an executive member of the Returned Serviceman's League, and CEO of the Melbourne Olympic Games in 1954. While scope exists to include his contribution as a part of a more traditional interpretation of his career through his command experience, to do this would be to severely limit the understanding of his career achievements and his role in the history of the army.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Ron Austin, *Soldier's Soldier: The Life of Lieutenant General Carl Herman Jess* (McCrae: Slouch Hat Publications, 2001).

<sup>82</sup> Beaumont, 'The State of Australian Defence Force History', p. 138.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141.

Many other names might be added to this list: Major General Julius Bruche, Lieutenant General Sydney Rowell, Major General Jack Stevens, Lieutenant General Cyril Clowes, Major General Edward Milford, Lieutenant General John Northcott, and Lieutenant General Vernon Sturdee.<sup>84</sup> Investigations of these officers would provide significant insights not just to their career but also in the areas of the political– military interface<sup>85</sup> and the problems of working within coalitions and in often-overlooked campaigns such as Milne Bay in 1942 and New Guinea, 1944–1945. This list, of course, does not include the high number of officers who have made substantial contributions to the Australian army in the post-Second World War era. Many of these soldiers held important command positions during their careers, but often in areas considered as ‘backwaters’.

### *On reflection*

There have been a number of major advances in the depth of the genre of Australian army biography over the past three decades. This is in part due to the increased interest of academic historians, coupled with societies changing ideas on the role of the individual in Australia’s past. The rise of the ‘memory industry’ during the 1990s has also enriched the history of Australia’s military past.<sup>86</sup> Historians now stand at a crossroads with this genre. With the advances that have been made to professionalize this area of research, academic scholars should now seize the opportunities that these investigations have pioneered. There is still ample room for a continuation of research into the existing ‘categories’ of military biography. However, the limits of the genre need to be continually expanded. Casting the net further afield in terms of biographical subjects is but one way of broadening the dimensions of historical scholarship in this area. The other is through the need to weld together the areas of operational and social histories of war. Only with further historical

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<sup>84</sup> Major General Julius Bruche — Chief of the General Staff (1930–1935); Major-General Jackie Stevens — GOC Northern Territory Force (1942–1943), GOC 6th Division, AIF (1943–1945), Secretary of the Department of Supply (1951–1952), and Chairman of the Atomic Energy Authority (1952–1956).

Lt-General Sydney Rowell — GSO1 6th Division (1939–1940) and 1st Australian Corps (1940–1941), DCGS (1941–1942), GOC 1st Aust Corps (1942) Vice-CGS (1946–1950), CGS (1950–1954), Chairman of Commonwealth

Aircraft Corporation (1957–1968); Rowell has written an autobiography, *Full Circle*, and has received a chapter in *The Commanders*, ed. by David Horner. He is yet to have a biographer.

Major-General Sir Jack Stevens (CMF Soldier) — Commander 21st Brigade (1940–1942), GOC 4th and 12th Divisions, CO N.T. Force (1942–1943), GOC 6th Division (1943–1945), Secretary Dept of Supply (1951–1952), Chairman of the Atomic Energy Authority (1952–1956).

Major-General Edward Milford — Director of Artillery (1939–1940), CRA 7th Division (1940–1941), Master-General Ordnance (1941–1942), GOC 4th Division (1942–1944), MGGS N.G. Force (1944), GOC 7th Division (1945), DCGS & Adjutant-General (1946–1948).

Lieutenant General Vernon Sturdee — Director of Military Operation and Intelligence (1933–1938), Chief of the General Staff (1940–1942 & 1946–1950), GOC 1st Australian Army (1944) and Commander in Chief Australian Military Forces (1945).

<sup>85</sup> See Horner, ‘Australian Military Biographies’.

<sup>86</sup> One could argue that this has continued this decade with the anniversaries of the Great War, although there has not been an accompanying rush of Great War biographies of Australian soldiers.

research in these areas will we begin to understand the broader contributions that these men and women played not only to the nation's military past, but also to the wider Australian community.

#### Notes on contributor

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