



*'Peace loans' were used by the federal government during World War I to raise money for the war effort. Poster, c1916, artist unknown.*

NATIONAL LIBRARY

## CHAPTER 47

# THE PEOPLE AT WAR

MICHAEL McKERNAN

AUSTRALIANS HAVE SHOWN considerable enthusiasm to participate in the wars of other nations. They have fought in nine wars—from the Maori wars in New Zealand to the Vietnam War—but, of course, the wars of the twentieth century dominate Australian military history. World Wars I and II account for most of the 100 000 or more Australians killed in war. During World War I Australia sent 350 000 men overseas to fight, and in World War II nearly a million men and women were put in uniform.

Australian writing about war has been very uneven and, until recently, has attracted the attention of few professional historians. Much has been written by the participants in war; this is understandable because for them war was a time of great excitement and drama. Many of these writers wished to pay tribute to comrades who had been killed and to celebrate the group loyalty that participation in war produces. A great deal of this writing is described generally as 'battalion history'—the story of a unit's service from war's beginning to end. Some of these histories make excellent reading but others are of interest largely to the participants in the events described.

It is not difficult to understand the concentration of books relating to Australia's part in World War I. Australians regarded that war as a major opportunity to play a part, for the first time as a nation, on the world stage. They saw the war, therefore, as a time of high historical drama and were determined to capture and record every moment of importance. Artists, photographers and writers were appointed to the Australian Imperial Force to ensure that future generations would understand all that had transpired. C.E.W. Bean, a Sydney journalist with impressive imperial credentials, was elected by his colleagues in the Australian Journalists' Association as the government's official correspondent but, soon after the Australians went into action, he determined that the events warranted more than a transitory account. He began making plans for a national official history that would tell of all major actions in which the Australians were involved. He began collecting and preserving papers and diaries and before the end of the war a War Records Section was in operation collecting materials that would subsequently form the basis of the huge Australian War Memorial collection.

Bean began his history soon after the war ended in 1918. He had been with the troops since they first went into action and he resolved to write about only what he had seen; others were appointed to cover the campaigns unknown to Bean. The first of the twelve-volume history—*The story of Anzac*—was published in 1921 and the last in 1942, when Australia was at war again. Bean wrote six of the books himself but left to others the story of the Australians in



the air, in Palestine and Rabaul, and the bitter account of the effect of the war on the home front. There was also a three-volume companion medical history written by A.G. Butler.

When war broke out again in 1939 Australians were much more cautious and much less inclined to see war as a moment of high historical importance for their nation. Even so, in 1942 another Sydney journalist, Gavin Long, was appointed official historian, and he began drawing up plans for a history on the same scale, at least, as Bean's. Entitled *Australia in the war of 1939–1945*, it eventually consisted of 22 volumes, including a four-volume medical history. The first volume was published in 1952 and the last in 1977. Long's history was as detailed as Bean's; the aim again was to recount every significant action in which the Australians were engaged. As general editor Long enlisted many more writers for his history. Both Bean (1946) and Long (1973) wrote a summary volume of their wars but these appeared long after the events they recorded and were seen somewhat as an appendage of the official histories.

The result of all this diligent labour was not what the editors and authors might have expected. Instead of beginning an interest in military history and opening up arguments which other historians could explore, they seem to have stunned their colleagues by amassing such a wealth of detail that for many years the official histories and the companion battalion histories remained all that was written on Australian military history. Few other historians bothered to enter an area which had been, apparently, so well covered.

So far had the military historical enterprise fallen from grace that no historian (or Sydney journalist) was sent as an official correspondent with the Australians to Korea or Vietnam and no-one bothered much with the records that would be needed to write the history of these conflicts. Somewhat belatedly, in 1969, Dr Robert O'Neill, then senior lecturer in history at Royal Military College, Duntroon, was appointed to a half-time position as Korean historian. His first volume appeared in 1981 and the second in 1984—even further behind the events he described than either Bean or Long. The Vietnam official historian, Dr Peter Edwards, was appointed in 1982, but his volumes will not be published for some years yet.

The accounts by official historians were all that could be shown as Australian military history for too long. Paradoxically, under the stimulus of the Vietnam War, historians generally began to turn to military history and to embark on an examination of the approaches, themes and issues ignored by the government-sponsored writers. World War I caught their attention, probably because political and social historians had become fascinated by the insights this period could throw on current questions such as conscription, pacifism and opposition to war. The new military historians explored the impact of World War I on individuals, through biographies and by opening up the archives of the Australian War Memorial. Bill Gammage (1975) showed what might be made of that rich collection. Gammage was a pioneer, rediscovering a long neglected field and stimulating a generation of writers, poets, artists and film-makers. He also represented a new breed of historian—his research work was done as a doctoral student at the Australian National University—the state-funded researcher who replaced the 'official historian' and had the research time required to explore many aspects of the nation's past.

Less effort, unfortunately, has been devoted by these historians to the colonial wars or to World War II and beyond. Notable exceptions are K.S. Inglis, *The rehearsal: Australians at war in the Sudan 1885* (Sydney, Rigby, 1985) and David Horner (1978, 1982), whose two theses—subsequently published—have initiated discussion on the relationship between the military and civil powers in wartime and the relationship between the various commanders. Horner continues to be fascinated with the problem of command and has stimulated a considerable departure from the Bean and Long tradition which focused inexorably on the common soldier in battle.

The creative literature of Australia at war is treated briefly in the following bibliography. World War I did not produce in Australia an extraordinary group of soldier poets as it did in England. Leon Gellert, Vance Palmer and Harley Matthews wrote some fine poems about their experience at the front but most of the poetry written at home was little more than drum-beating for the empire. Zora Cross and Mary Gilmore were exceptional in that their poetry considered the wastefulness of war and the possibility of pacifism.



A few novels emerged from a direct experience of the war—Frederick Manning's *Her private we* (London, Davies, 1930), Leonard Mann's *Flesh in armour* (Melbourne, Phaedrus, 1932) and Frank Dalby Davison's *The wells of Beersheba* (A & R, 1933)—but the war has continued as a major interest of Australian writers. Martin Boyd's *Lucinda Brayford* (London, Cresset, 1946) and the Langton novels were written after World War II but are pervaded by Boyd's own experiences in the earlier war—especially the final Langton novel, *When blackbirds sing* (London, Abelard-Schuman, 1962). All these novels have at some time been reprinted.

Partly because World War II threatened Australia directly, a number of interesting novels were written in the immediate postwar years. These include fairly simple accounts of actual war experience such as Lawson Glassop's *We were the rats* (A & R, 1944) and others that raised questions about the nature of Australian society in the course of the account—for example, the novels by Eric Lambert, T.G. Hungerford and David Forrest. M. Barnard Eldershaw's *Tomorrow and tomorrow* (Melbourne, Georgian House, 1947) speculated about a defeated Australia and other women writers, such as Eleanor Dark and Dymphna Cusack, wrote novels that considered the problems of Australians at home. A final section of the Barnard Eldershaw novel was suppressed at the time of publication and has only recently been published in a new edition entitled *Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow* (London, Virago, 1983).

John Manifold and David Campbell gained recognition as soldier poets in World War II and others, such as Judith Wright and Kenneth Slessor, have written poems on the war and its effects. Contemporary poets have returned to World War I as a theme with considerable success. Their work has been brought together in Geoff Page's *Shadows from wire* (Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1983) and in Peter Pierce and Chris Wallace-Crabbe's anthology, *Clubbing the gunfire: 101 Australian war poems* (MUP, 1984).

The problem of selection in Australian military history is an unusual one. There is a large number of books within a quite narrow range—official histories, memoirs and battalion histories for the two world wars abound. The latter would number over 150. The Australian War Memorial has an 'in-house' bibliography in loose-leaf form of these battalion histories, some of which are being reprinted by John Burridge of Perth. However, the official and battalion histories concentrate on the two major wars and, apart from Inglis (1985), there is little of substance on the colonial wars—a field apparently still largely reserved for antiquarians—or on the Asian wars in which Australians have fought. There is little exploration, too, of strategy or tactics, little on the relationships between Australian and Allied forces, and little operational history at a level above the battalion. As in so many areas of Australian history, much remains to be done.

The approach in assembling the following bibliography has been firstly chronological and secondly representative. A list that included only the best works would concentrate on World War I and would scarcely cover recent events, the official histories excepted. The general reader, however, will want guidance on all wars in which Australians have fought and will also seek a variety of approaches to writing about war. The serious student will want to see how writing about war has changed over the years; therefore works of some antiquity have been included. The references have been divided into two major sections: bibliographies and general works; and theatres of war (arranged chronologically). The field is now expanding rapidly as historians come to realise that Bean and Long have not said the last word. Australian military history is, at last, entering the mainstream of the historical enterprise.





## BIBLIOGRAPHIES AND GENERAL WORKS

- BARTLETT, N. ed, *Australia at arms*. Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1955. 275 p, illus, maps.  
 Anthology of first-hand accounts of Australians in action in colonial times and in two world wars.
- DORNBUSCH, C.E. *Australian military bibliography*. Cornwallville, New York, Hope Farm Press, 1963. 80 p.  
 A standard reference tool, somewhat dated and incomplete.
- FIELDING, J. AND O'NEILL, R. *A select bibliography of Australian military history 1891-1939*. Canberra, Australian National University; Australian Dictionary of Biography, 1978. 351 p.  
 Surveys the major historical sources, official and non-official, manuscript and printed works, with brief commentary on most items.
- FIRKINS, P.C. *The Australians in nine wars: Waikato to Long Tan*. Adelaide, Rigby, 1971. 448 p, illus, maps.  
 An overview for newcomers to military history.
- ODGERS, G. *Pictorial history of the Royal Australian Air Force*. Sydney, Ure Smith, 1977. 160 p, illus, map.  
 The RAAF from formation in 1914 to 1976 with illustrations of action, personnel and machines. First published in 1965 as *The Royal Australian Air Force: an illustrated history*.
- ODGERS, G. *The Royal Australian Navy: an illustrated history*. Sydney, Child & Henry, 1982. 224 p, illus, maps.  
 The RAN from formation, concentrating on the ships of the fleet and their history.
- STANLEY, P. AND McKERNAN, M. *Australians at war, 1885-1972: photographs from the collection of the Australian War Memorial*. Sydney, Collins, 1984. 260 p, illus.  
 Coffee table format with some excellent images.
- WIGMORE, L.G. ed, *They dared mightily*. Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1963. 317 p, illus, maps.  
 The stories of each Australian awarded the Victoria Cross or the George Cross, with an account of war service and an extract from the award citation.

## THE SUDAN, CHINA AND SOUTH AFRICA

- ABBOTT, J.H.M. *Tommy Cornstalk, being some account of the less notable features of the South Africa war from the point of view of the Australian ranks*. London, Longman Green, 1902. 264 p.  
 An idiosyncratic view of war from the ranks.
- ATKINSON, J.J. *Australian contingents to the China Field Force, 1900-1901*. Sydney, NSW Military Historical Society, 1976. 69 p, illus, maps.  
 A description of the campaign and a nominal role of all Australian participants.
- HUTCHINSON, F. AND MYERS, F. *The Australian contingent: a history of the patriotic movement in New South Wales and an account of the despatch of troops to the assistance of the imperial forces in the Soudan*. Sydney, Government Printer, 1885. 285 p.  
 Includes political and social comments on Australia's response to the empire's call.
- MURRAY, P.L. *Official records of the Australian military contingents to the war in South Africa*. Melbourne, Government Printer, 1911. 607 p.  
 The complete nominal roll.
- WALLACE, R.L. *The Australians at the Boer War*. Canberra, Australian War Memorial and AGPS, 1976. 402 p, illus, maps.

A complete account of all action in South Africa involving Australians.

WILKINSON, F. *Australian cavalry: the NSW Lancer Regiment and the First Australian Horse*. A & R, 1901. viii, 64 p, illus.  
 Gives impressions of the Boer War, with an emphasis on action with a romantic flavour.

## WORLD WAR I

- ADAM-SMITH, P. *The Anzacs*. Melbourne, Nelson, 1985. 492 p, illus.  
 An illustrated account of the horrors and the effects of the war on the individual soldier.
- BEAN, C.E.W. *Anzac to Amiens: a shorter history of the Australian fighting services in the First World War*. Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1946. 567 p, illus, maps.  
 Bean's summary of the twelve-volume history; an excellent short account of the fighting.
- BEAN, C.E.W. ed, *The official history of Australia in the war of 1914-1918*. A & R, 1921-42. 12 vols, illus, maps.  
 Recounts every significant action in which Australians participated. Celebratory of their unique fighting qualities, this work established a tradition in military history. The twelve volumes are progressively being reprinted by UQP.
- BURKE, K. ed, *With horse and mose in Mesopotamia: the story of Anzacs in Asia*. Sydney, Arthur McQuitty, 1927. 200 p, illus, maps.  
 Australian and New Zealand wireless signal squadrons in the Middle East; an account of Australians of 'Dunsterforce' in Persia and Russia.
- BUTLER, A.G. ed, *Official history of the Australian army medical services in the war of 1914-1918*. Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1930-43. 3 vols, illus, maps.  
 An adjunct to Bean's history, providing the story of doctors, nurses and orderlies in all theatres.
- GAMMAGE, W.L. *The broken years: Australian soldiers in the Great War*. Ringwood, Vic, Penguin, 1975. 328 p, illus, maps.  
 A moving book showing what the frontline soldier wrote about the war in his letters and diaries. Every phase of the fighting is covered. First published in 1974.
- HILL, A.J. *Chauvel of the Light Horse: a biography of General Sir Harry Chauvel, G.C.M.G., K.C.B.* MUP, 1978. 265 p, illus, maps.  
 The biography of the commander and tactician, providing a good account of Australian fighting in the Middle East during World War I.
- LAIRD, J.L. ed, *Other banners: an anthology of Australian literature of the First World War*. Canberra, Australian War Memorial and AGPS, 1971. 188 p.  
 Selections cover the various theatres of war, imperial sentiments, pacifism and return to civilian life.
- McKERNAN, M. *The Australian people and the Great War*. Sydney, Collins, 1984. 242 p, illus.  
 Explores the eager response in Australia to the call of empire. First published in 1980.
- ROBSON, L.L. *The first A.I.F.: a study of its recruitment 1914-1918*. MUP, 1982. 227 p, illus.  
 The first of a new generation of historians to take up military history after Bean. His book is a social profile of the 'diggers'. First published in 1970.
- SERLE, G. *John Monash: a biography*. MUP in association with Monash University, 1982. 600 p, illus, maps.  
 A fine rounded biography rather than specialist military history.



Explains why Monash was Australia's most successful general.

WELBORN, S. *Lords of death: a people, a place, a legend*. Fremantle, WA, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1982. 223 p, illus, maps.

A regional study of the recruitment of the AIF, arguing the 'spirit of the place' shaped the men's response to war.

WILLIAMS, R. *These are facts: the autobiography of Air Marshall Sir Richard Williams, KBE, CB, DSO*. Canberra, Australian War Memorial and AGPS, 1977. 428 p, illus, maps.

An autobiography from a long-serving senior commander. Covers service during the two world wars and includes an account of the formation of the RAAF.

## WORLD WAR II

ADAM-SMITH, P. *Australia women at war*. Melbourne, Nelson, 1984. 386 p, illus.

A pioneering study of the role of women in World War II. Well illustrated but weak on historical analysis.

AUSTRALIA in the war of 1939–1945. Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1952–77. 22 vols, illus, maps.

Prime Minister Chifley asked that this history be made more accessible to the general reader than Bean's. Concentrating on detail, this aim was not met, but the work is definitive. Divided into five series: Army, Navy, Air, Civil and Medical. The volumes are selectively being reissued by the Australian War Memorial.

THE GRIM glory of the 2/19 Battalion A.I.F., by various members of the Unit Association. Sydney, 2/19 Battalion AIF Association, 1975. 837 p, illus, maps.

Formed in 1940, this battalion fought in the Malayan campaign and on Singapore island before captivity. Represents the war experience of thousands of Australians.

HAYWOOD, E.V. *Six years in support: official history of 2nd/1st Australian Field Regiment*. Ed by A.G. Hanson. A & R, 1959. 211 p, illus, maps.

The regiment fought in north Africa and in New Guinea. Provides an insight to the *esprit-de-corps* of a unit in action.

HETHERINGTON, J.A. *Blamey, controversial soldier: a biography of Field Marshall Sir Thomas Blamey, GBE, KCB, CMG, DSO, ED*. Canberra, Australian War Memorial and AGPS, 1973. 414 p, illus.

Blamey was Menzies' surprise choice to command the second AIF. Shows why Blamey aroused such strong feelings. First published in 1954.

HORNER, D.M. *Crisis of command: Australian generalship and the Japanese threat, 1941–1943*. ANUP, 1978. 395 p, illus, maps.

The first of the 'new wave' World War II military histories. A judicious account of tensions and in-fightings at the highest level of Australian command.

HORNER, D.M. *High command: Australian and allied strategy, 1939–1945*. Sydney, Allen & Unwin; Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1982. 556 p, illus, maps.

Shows how the use of Australian troops depended as much on political considerations as on strategic ones.

KEOGH, E.G. *Middle East 1939–43*. Melbourne, Wilke, 1959. 302 p, illus, maps.

Written from the viewpoint of army command it examines

tactical operations of the Australians in the north African campaign.

LONG, G.M. *The six years war: a concise history of Australia in the 1939–45 war*. Canberra, Australian War Memorial and AGPS, 1973. 518 p, illus, maps.

For the general reader this is the best place to start to understand Australia's enormous contribution to the Allied cause.

McKERNAN, M. *All in! Australia during the Second World War*. Melbourne, Nelson, 1983. 286 p, illus.

The home front response to the second European war and the reaction to the threat of Japanese invasion.

PARNELL, N.M. *Whispering death: a history of the RAAF's Beaufighter squadrons*. Sydney, Reed, 1980. 128 p, illus, maps.

The story of the Beaufighter squadrons involved in the defence of Australia 1942–43. Includes a nominal roll and a technical appendix.

VOLUNTEER DEFENCE CORPS. *On guard with the Volunteer Defence Corps*. Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1944. 172 p, illus.

One of a series of first-hand accounts. All contributions are anonymous, giving, perhaps, greater authenticity.

## KOREA AND VIETNAM

BARTLETT, N. ed, *With the Australians in Korea*. Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1960. 294 p, illus, maps.

An anthology of first-hand accounts of action, using the narratives of combatants and war correspondents. First published in 1954.

FAIRFAX, D. *Navy in Vietnam: a record of the Royal Australian Navy in the Vietnam War, 1965–1972*. AGPS, 1980. 232 p, illus, maps.

Sponsored by the Dept of Defence, this tells of naval action, concentrating on the deployment of each ship.

McNEILL, I. *The team: Australian advisers in Vietnam 1962–1972*. Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1984. 528 p.

The first major work about the advisers who worked in every part of South Vietnam. The most complete account, until the publication of an official history.

ODGERS, G. *Across the parallel: the Australian 77th Squadron with the United States Air Force in the Korean War*. London, Heinemann, 1952. 239 p, illus, maps.

An attempt to recreate the life of a squadron, imaginative but based on fact.

ODGERS, G. *Mission Vietnam: Royal Australian Air Force operations, 1964–1972*. AGPS, 1974. 186 p, illus, map.

Sponsored by the Dept of Defence. Covers all significant RAAF actions in Vietnam.

O'NEILL, R.J. *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53*. Canberra, Australian War Memorial and AGPS, 1981 and 1984. 2 vols, illus.

Analyses the strategic and diplomatic impact of war and Australia's operational involvement.

O'NEILL, R.J. *Vietnam task: the 5th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment 1966/67*. Melbourne, Cassell, 1968. 256 p, illus, maps.

A battalion history concentrating on the men involved.

