



journal
of the Australian War Memorial

Editorial guidelines

The *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* is an occasional publication, for the purpose of advancing the Memorial's mission of remembering and interpreting the Australian experience of war and, more generally, in order to disseminate research into Australian military history.

Scope

The *Journal* welcomes submissions of up to 8,000 words. Articles are anonymously reviewed before acceptance. Intending contributors should discuss their proposals with the [Editor](#).

The *Journal* publishes articles on all aspects of Australian military history, including those dealing with the social and cultural impact of war, with the political and diplomatic context of war, and with the related experience of allied forces.

Authors are encouraged to consider the material cultural aspect of their topics. This may mean, for instance, taking into account photographic, battlefield or archaeological evidence. It may mean giving particular consideration to the nature of archival evidence. Articles on war art, photography or cinematography are welcome. The *Journal* does not specialise in militaria but authors should not be discouraged from submitting articles which place uniforms, equipment and technology at the centre of their analysis.

Authors who feel that study of the Memorial's museum collections can enhance their work should [contact](#) the Editor to discuss access to the collections.

Illustrations

Suggestions for illustrations are welcome. Where desirable, photographs of items from the Memorial's collection can be arranged by discussing these requirements with the Editor.

Submitting an article

Articles must be submitted in either Microsoft Word or RTF, and must be emailed to journal@awm.gov.au. An abstract of no more than 300 words must also be included.

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ANZAC Day to VP Day: arguments and interpretations Joan Beaumont

Professor Joan Beaumont is Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Alfred Deakin Professor, Deakin University, Victoria, Australia. Her publications include *Gull Force: survival and leadership in captivity, 1941–1945*; *Australia's war 1914-18* (ed.); *Australia's war 1939–45* (ed.), vol. 6 of the Centenary of Australian Defence, *Australian defence: sources and statistics*; and (with David Lowe and Chris Waters), *Ministers, mandarins and diplomats: Australian foreign policy making, 1941–1969*. She is currently working on a study of the Second World War and Australian memory, including commemoration of the Burma–Thailand Railway.

What is the current state of Australian historiography of the two world wars? As editor of the reference volume in the seven-volume series that marked the centenary of the Australian defence, *Australian defence: sources and statistics*,^[1] I had a unique opportunity some five years ago to consider this question. The coverage of the volume was wide: encompassing not only the battles and campaigns in which Australian defence forces were involved in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, defence policy, and commanders of the defence forces, but also the impact of war on Australian society; the economy and technology of war, weaponry, logistics, war memorials, and so on.

Such a survey suggests a number of conclusions about the state of Australian war historiography. The first is the degree to which, for much of the twentieth century the history of war developed in the shadow of C.E.W. Bean, war correspondent, spirit behind the Australian War Memorial, and self-appointed custodian of the ANZAC legend. This is hardly an original comment but it needs repeating that Bean's official history acquired such stature that to this day no one has tried to replace it with a comprehensive history of the AIF during the First World War. It is interesting to speculate whether there is any comparable figure dominating British war historiography. Perhaps Churchill did this for the Second World War, as David Reynolds's recent study of the war leader's writing suggests.^[2] Certainly Churchill's early access to government records ensured his dominance of the field until the 1970s when scholars began to have access to the archival record. Even then, it was some years before the knowledge of the dramatic successes of Allied code-breaking could be integrated into academic accounts of the war.

A second observation is the extent to which, thanks to Bean, Australia inherited a tradition of "democratic military history". This is a problematic piece of shorthand, but it encapsulates the fact that until comparatively recently, there was a dearth of studies of Australian high command, grand strategy, logistics, and doctrine. To a very considerable degree, this gap has now been filled. David Horner has published extensively since the 1970s on high command, during the Second World War particularly,^[3] and the Australian Army Military History Series that he has edited from the 1990s has resulted in a number of good (if not always sparkling) histories of commanders of both world wars.^[4] There are few major commanders of the AIF in the two world wars who now lack at least one scholarly biography.^[5]

The same cannot be said for the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) and the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF)^[6] – a fact that reflects another characteristic of the Australian historiography of war that has often been commented upon: namely, its dominance by the history of the army. This is not simply because of the predominance of land operations and army casualties in the First World War particularly, but because the memory of war, and the commemorative practices and rituals associated

with this, are linked strongly to physical place. Naval warfare leaves no scars on the landscape, no battlefields that can be traversed and invested with personal meaning. Air warfare, meanwhile, with its high technology and moral ambiguity resulting from its use against civilian populations during the Second World War, has limited potential for celebratory mythology. The ANZAC of popular imagination is therefore a soldier, not a sailor or airman.

However, to some degree this bias against the RAN and RAAF has been mitigated in the last two decades by two further developments in Australian war historiography: namely, the professionalisation of this genre, and the far more active engagement by the defence forces in the writing of their service history (an engagement manifested notably in the work of the Army History Unit, the Sea Power Centre, and the Aerospace Centre, to use their current titles). Thanks to these efforts there has been a growth in Australian naval and air history in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as new operational studies.

This professionalisation of Australian defence history coincided with the most striking and interesting development of recent decades: the resurgence in the memory of war in both popular culture and official commemoration. How much the Defence research units contributed to this development, or were stimulated by it, is unclear. However, although the popular media is inclined to represent the new interest in ANZAC and war commemoration as an organic and spontaneous occurrence – evidence of a new national pride that they take as unproblematic and positive. In fact, the national calendar of war ritual and commemoration that has emerged in the last two decades has been carefully orchestrated by federal governments of both political persuasions. The “memory industry” has also been implemented with considerable finesse and enthusiasm by government agencies, notably the Department of Veterans’ Affairs and the Australian War Memorial, who have a strong institutional logic in promoting it.

This is not to say that the new memory of war has been entirely manufactured. There are two dominant approaches in the burgeoning international literature on war memory and commemoration; one, which has been identified with Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson, argues that war memory is shaped centrally by the state. An alternative approach, dominated by the work of Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, has a “psychological” emphasis, seeing war memory and commemoration “as an expression of mourning and a human response to the death and suffering of war”. This approach, while not denying the importance of the state, downplays its significance and focuses more on “the work of remembrance performed by the agencies of civil society”.^[7] However, this polarity is almost certainly unhelpful: we cannot understand the resurgence of interest in the memory of war, unless we see it as *interaction* between state and individual agency. Moreover, commemorative activities at the national level are only embraced by societies if they resonate with individual memories of the past.

That said, the agency of the state in Australia in the past two decades has been remarkable. The 1995 Australia Remembers campaign, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War – a process well-documented in Liz Reed’s *Bigger than Gallipoli: war, history, and memory in Australia*^[8] – was one of the most striking examples of this orchestration of memory. It would be instructive to know the total monies spent by Australian Government agencies on new memorials, pilgrimages, museum gallery development, and war-related official and educational materials since 1990.

The memory industry has also been fed by, and has contributed to, the growth in popular war history in the last decade. To a striking degree Australian war history for many years has been reliant on what might be called non-academic historians: namely, freelance historians and the amateur historian, often a veteran. These writers continue to be important – *vide* Cameron Forbes’s new history of prisoners of war,^[9] Les Carylton’s history of Gallipoli,^[10] and Peter Brune’s series on the Papua and New Guinea campaigns^[11] – to name only some. An intriguing question is why the academic community has not tapped into this popular market more effectively?

First, however, we need to consider another point about the nature of Australian historiography of war. This is its compartmentalisation into sub-genres, the gendered nature of these sub-genres, and the lack of dialogue between historians working in these areas. Military history (in the sense of command operations and tactics) has usually been written by men, many of whom work in Canberra, either in defence research institutes, the Australian War Memorial, the Department of Veterans’ Affairs, and the two academic institutions, the Australian National University (ANU) and the Australian Defence Force

Academy. Naval and air history similarly. Other fields of the history of war – the impact on the two world wars on societies and gendered roles, the home front, the patriotic war effort, grief, mourning, memory and commemoration – have been researched largely by women in cities other than Canberra. Of course, there have been notable exceptions – Ken Inglis writing on war memorials in Canberra^[12], Bart Ziino working on war graves and memory in Melbourne,^[13] for example – and the geographical divide has been eroded by researchers at the ANU. But the “two worlds” are nonetheless real.

The historiography of war has been fragmented in a further way. Despite the many publications of the past two decades, Australian historians of war are generally still producing the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle: that is, they are still doing the primary research that will provide the building blocks for the more integrative histories that characterise the best scholarship of war internationally. Jeff Grey^[14] and Alan Stephens^[15] are two of the few defence historians that have been willing to write broad survey history – and then, of course, it has been assumed that that task has been done. It is striking in Australian history of war how often one or two authors dominate a field. It is as if there is an informal consensus that one book on a subject is enough: that each biography is definitive and uncontested. This is certainly not the case in the United Kingdom – *vide* the extraordinary number of books on Churchill published recently. Perhaps this is a function of the small size of the academic community in the history of war in Australia; or the timidity and conservatism of publishing houses. But whatever the causes, this does not make for a healthy and vibrant discipline.

So where do we go from here? How do we bridge the gap between the historians of war? It should be noted that the distance is not just one of content but of discourse. Australian historians of war position themselves across a spectrum which has become increasingly wide as the discipline of history itself has become more diverse in its attitude to evidence, theory and content. Over the past three decades the history of war has engaged internationally with – and in some cases, pioneered – many of the theoretical and methodological innovations that the wider discipline of history has spawned. These include oral history in the 1960s, feminism in the 1970s, and memory from the 1990s. But this widening has in fact contributed to the fragmentation, rather than cohesion, of the discipline. Just as within history itself, the historiography of war includes a number of competing discourses and methodologies.

At one end of the spectrum is what might be called “traditional” military historians — that is, those concerned with studying command, operations, tactics, military leadership, grand strategy, defence policy, and military technology. These historians are generally of the view that the appropriate sources of evidence are archival (official and private papers). Their approach has been largely empirical, even when they use oral history, to “fill in the factual gaps”. Traditional military history is inclined to take the nation state and the national interest as unproblematic; it has tended to be confident about producing a narrative that is authoritative (hence the one book on each subject syndrome?), and is prone to be instrumentalist. At its crudest, this genre claims that we study military history to “learn the lessons of history” and to inform future practice of war. This kind of history tends to accept war as, in some circumstances, necessary, justifiable, and useful politically – a position that leads at times to accusations that such military historians legitimate war or government policy.

A second group of historians is what can be loosely called “war and society” (though the term emerged in the 1970s with Arthur Marwick,^[16] it continues to have some utility). These historians are concerned with the impact of war on domestic society, politics, and economics. Given that this leads them to focus on women, the family, and changes in living and working conditions, these historians have been much more engaged with the gendered nature of war. (Women, if they appear in traditional military history, tend to be included in the sense of “women were there too alongside the men”.) But excluding feminism, and the occasional invocation of the concept of class, the field of war and society in Australia has not been especially theoretically innovative. Conceptually, it seems trapped within notions such as “change” and “conflict”: and whether the changes catalysed by war are deemed progressive or not is determined by the values and ideologies of the historians (*vide* the neglect of patriotic women in the First World War by early feminist historians). ^[17] Is it possible that, with the decline of Marxism, there is no meta-paradigm with which to critique political, social, and economic change in wartime? Perhaps citizenship, a concept that is attracting considerable new literature internationally, can provide a new organising principle for a field which is somewhat stale.

Or does emotional history provide a key to new understandings? This has certainly been the case with studies of grief and mourning in which Joy Damousi has played such a leading role. [18] Bart Ziino is conducting research at Deakin University that promises to re-conceptualise the domestic history of the First World War by using emotions as an analytical category: anger, fear, anxiety, endurance, loyalty, enthusiasm and doubt, suspicion and paranoia. The intriguing aspect to this approach is that emotions are both universal and mediated through class and gender. "Loyalty" is usually constructed as imperial loyalty (if we accept Prime Minister Billy Hughes's hegemonic paradigm), or as mateship (that extraordinarily overworked word). But were there not other forms of loyalty through which the experience of war was mediated: loyalty to family, class, church, the union movement – internationalism even? Emotional history of war also has the potential to redress the imbalance in First World War literature between the soldiers' and civilians' experiences by finding points of commonality rather than difference between the battle and home fronts, which are often depicted as separate worlds.

A final group of historians that must be mentioned are those concerned with memory. This field shares a concern with other groups: the impact of war on individuals. But the focus is on individual grief and memory and how these are mediated at the collective and national level through social and family structures, cultural production, and commemorative practices and ritual. What makes this field so intellectually exciting is that memory is inherently interdisciplinary (in its concern with meaning and individual psychology) and that, at its best, the literature is exploring the dynamics of political representation of war, not only in the past but in the present. War becomes relevant not because we can apply the principles of past conflicts to current ones, but because it is being mobilised by the agencies of state for contemporary political purposes.

The history of memory is much more sympathetic to postmodernism than the other traditions. Of its very nature it accepts that there are multiple voices and multiple meanings. Its sources will include cultural products — literature, mass media, film, monuments, memorials, and art — as well as archival records. Oral history and personal memoirs are seen as testimony rather than an empirical source, as they tend to be even in the "face of battle" types of military history. And if the code words for war and society history are "change" and "conflict", then the leitmotifs of memory are "tragedy", "loss", "mourning", and "suffering".

Of course, these divisions are inevitably arbitrary and fail to recognise the subtleties within each field. But they throw into relief the problem that needs to be addressed for the future. The divisions among Australian historians of war are not just about content. Rather we use different languages, different discourses. We also "do" history differently. Some in the academy see traditional military history as lacking in theoretical innovation. Military historians, in contrast, tend to think memory history is "soft" and lacking in appropriate archival and empirical rigour. Or it is seen as opaque, turgid, and prone to jargon (a common complaint also against feminist history of war). To quote Peter Londey in his review of Reed's book: Reed would be "well served by a publisher who refused to allow her to use the word 'gendered' at all". [19]

The hostility to theory is, of course, endemic in the wider community. The recent popular histories of war are positioned firmly in the more traditional and uncritical genre of military history. There is a fear that the more theoretical an historian, the less appealing to a popular market. It is this perhaps that has led academics to surrender the popular market to journalists but it has had the lamentable effect of meaning that academics talk largely to their peers. And it means that the more crudely celebratory histories of Australians at war dominate popular understandings. Londey, again, says in his review of Reed's book that it "reminds us of the need for historians to go on maximum alert whenever governments start commemorating the past". But to sound that alert we need to communicate more effectively to the Australian public our critical perspectives and theoretically informed understandings.

So what to do? The future lies in thinking bigger and across boundaries. We should not be thinking of filling gaps, although it would be good to have more histories of Australians on the Western Front. Rather, historians of war should aspire to write in a manner that integrates content and approaches. It is striking how few historical overviews there are of Australia's experience of the two world wars, integrating the home and battlefield in the way that Trevor Wilson's *The myriad faces of war* [20] does for the United Kingdom. It is striking, therefore, how often conscription is discussed without reference to the terrible casualties concurrently being suffered on the Somme and Passchendaele – losses that account in part for the hysteria of the Australian population during the plebiscites.

It would be helpful also to reconceptualise the periodisation of war. Traditional military history is usually very comfortable about periodisation. But in Europe there is a growing tendency to see the two world wars as a continuum rather than as discrete conflicts. Two volumes edited by John Bourne, Peter Liddle, and Ian Whitehead in 2000 and 2001 took the title *The great world war 1914–1945*^[21]. How would Australian history of war be different if we strove to see continuities between the two world wars; if we explored themes that could be systemically explored across the two conflicts and the period between them? What would such themes be? War and citizenship? The role of the state? The changes in gendered roles? Representations of the body? Styles of command?

Internationally there is also a recognition of the fact that we need to see wars as not ending with ceasefires. Their consequences, for individuals and societies, do not conclude neatly on the 11 November 1918 or 15 August 1945. As Michael McKernan's study of prisoners of war says, for some the war never ends.^[22] Hence as we shed periodisation and seek to integrate and reconcile our different discourses, we should develop holistic, longitudinal studies. For example, it would be illuminating to take a battle – preferably one that has acquired iconic status, such as Gallipoli or Kokoda – and study it not only as an example of operations, tactics, logistics, and command but as a focus for post-war commemoration, ritual, and cultural production (film, memoir, popular fiction, etc.). Such a project would have to mobilise different discourses. Could such history be written by one person? Would a team approach be more productive? In some ways, yes, but how then could team research be written in a way that integrated different styles, methodologies, and discourses, rather than producing a series of chapters in which the different methodologies were oppositional rather than in synergy.

Such projects would be infinitely more exciting if they were comparative. Much of Australian history of war at the popular level is chauvinistic. And scholarly work is usually national in the sense it is focused exclusively on the Australian experience. The next and necessary stage of our understanding of war is to set the national experience more rigorously in an international context. This is as true of operational history, which has recently thrown off the shackles of the well-worn polarity of British incompetence versus Australian competence, as it is of memory and representation. How much richer our understanding of the commemoration of the First World War would be if we understood it as an imperial cultural phenomenon?

In conclusion, the questions that now confront Australian historians of war are:

- How do we move to produce histories of war that integrate the often competing discourses within the discipline?
- How do we ensure scholarly studies reclaim the domain of popular history?
- How do we shed national obsession and conduct comparative history?
- How do we see the two world wars as a continuum and not discrete?
- What is our role, as historians, in shaping the memory of war?

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