Number 45 | Autumn 2021

RECONNAISSANCE

The Magazine of the Military History Society of New South Wales Inc
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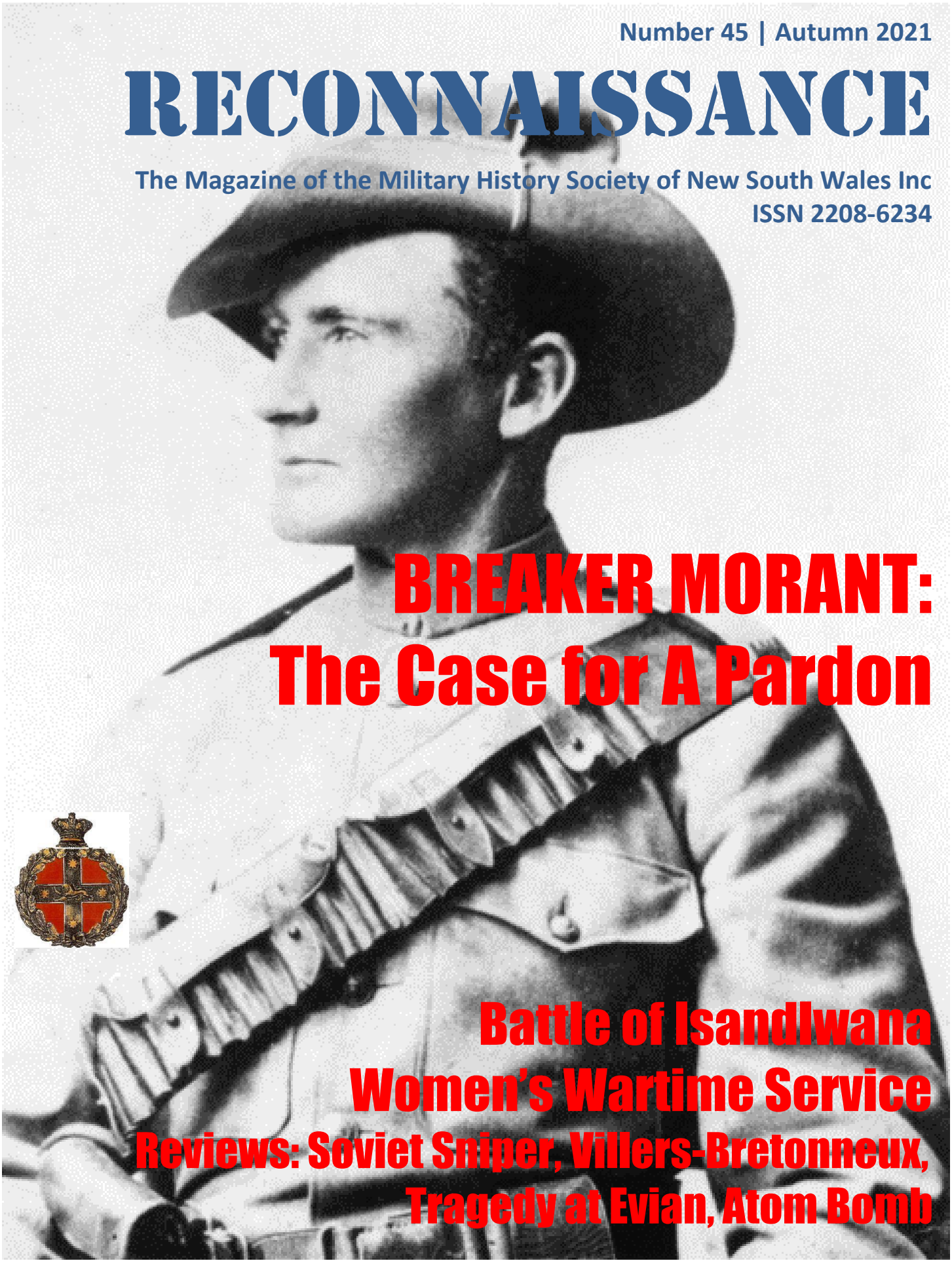

BREAKER MORANT: The Case for A Pardon

Battle of Isandlwana

Women's Wartime Service

Reviews: Soviet Sniper, Villers-Bretonneux, Tragedy at Evian, Atom Bomb

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The Magazine of the Military History Society of NSW Incorporated

Number 45 | Autumn 2021 (June 2021)

PATRON: Major General the Honourable Justice Paul Brereton AM RFD

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President's Message

Dear Members,

I am gratified to have been re-elected President of the Society at our AGM on 6 February 2021 and I congratulate Seumas Tan on his election as Vice President, Danesh Bamji and Frances Cairns on their election as Council Members and John Muscat on his election as Public Officer. In particular I would like to welcome back Frances who took a break from the Council after a very solid contribution. I was very impressed at the larger than usual attendance at the AGM and I

thank all who attended. The position of Secretary is still vacant and I hope to have that role filled at the earliest opportunity.

The AGM and the subsequently well-attended lecture were held at our magnificent new venue at Anzac Memorial Hyde Park. The Auditorium there is a great improvement on our previous venues and of course the Memorial is worth a visit in itself. The facilities are top class and attendees at our events have access to other wings of the complex, including the memorial halls and exhibition spaces.

Judging from the attendance, the shift to 10:30 am from 2:00 am appears to be a success and at this point the 10:30 slot is likely be permanent.

Now that Covid restrictions are easing we can look forward to resuming the activities and plans we had in mind prior to the initial lockdown. I hope to have a number of announcements to make in the near future. These will cover details of our next excursion and some great speakers for our lecture program.

As a Council we would also like to do more to encourage ideas and suggestions from you our members. We are aware that you have a wealth of experience and connections in the field of military history. Please don't hesitate to come forward and raise your ideas with us at any time.

Robert Muscat
President,
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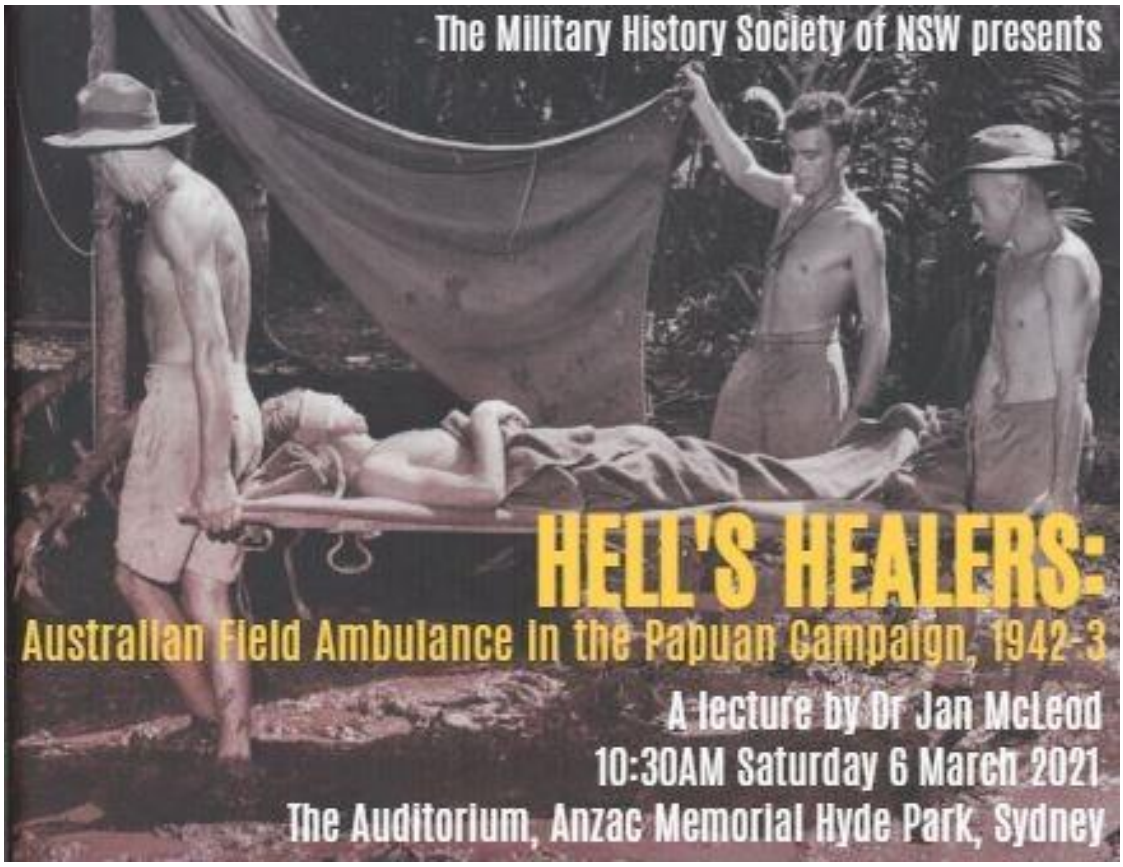
THE SOCIETY'S LECTURE PROGRAM 2021

Please note that the program may be subject to change for unforeseen reasons

ANNOUNCEMENT - VENUE

Our monthly lecture program has moved to 10:30am on the first Saturday of each month (except April 2021 when it will be the second Saturday). Our exciting new venue is the Auditorium at The Anzac Memorial Hyde Park. The Memorial is located within Hyde Park South. The closest cross streets are Elizabeth and Liverpool Streets, where several bus services stop. Museum train station is only a walkable 160 metres away.



During the Papuan Campaign of 1942-43, around six thousand Australian soldiers were killed or wounded while fighting Japanese forces at places like Ioribaiwa, Efogi, Kokoda, Milne Bay, Soputa, and Buna. A further thirty thousand suffered from a range of tropical diseases including malaria, dysentery and scrub typhus.

As the Australian Army fought its way across the Owen Stanleys, pushing the enemy north towards the Solomon Sea, medical supply lines stretched to breaking point. Distance between the frontline and the 2/9th Australian General Hospital at Port Moresby grew ever greater. With no effective means of large-scale casualty evacuation, it was left to personnel of the Australian Field Ambulance to treat and care for thousands of sick and wounded at rudimentary medical posts in the unforgiving Papuan environment.

This discussion will focus on the challenges faced by these units. To add a personal perspective, Dr Jan McLeod will reference the diary and photographs of her great-uncle Private L. N. Kennedy, who served as a nursing orderly in the 2/4th Australian Field Ambulance, 7th Division AIF.

LECTURE TIME AND VENUE:

Saturday, 6 March 2021, 10:30AM-11:30AM, Auditorium, Anzac Memorial Hyde Park, corner Elizabeth and Liverpool Streets, Sydney CBD. Admission is free of charge but a donation would be appreciated. At least 3 military history books will be raffled off in the course of the session (tickets $5.00 each). For further information call 0419 698 783 or email: president@militaryhistorynsw.com.au

Military History Calendar: December 2020 – February 2021

1 December HMAS Armidale sunk by Japanese aircraft near Timor, 1942.	**3 December** First AIF disembark in Egypt to protect Suez Canal, 1914.	**7 December** Evacuation of Gallipoli by British Empire forces begins, 1915.
7 December Japanese aircraft attack the American Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbour, 1941.	**8 December** Japanese attack Malaya and Thailand, Australia declares war on Japan, 1941.	**9 December** Australian troops occupy Gona, New Guinea, after heavy resistance from Japanese, 1942.
9 December The British Empire Desert Mounted Corp occupies Jerusalem, 1917.	**11 December** 1RAR begins Operation Fauna in Korea, destroying Chinese defences, 1952.	**11 December** Australian War Memorial expansion project receives environmental approval.
21 December Australian Light Horse captures El Arish from Turks in course of advance toward Palestine, 1916.	**23 December** Gen Chauvel's Mounted Brigade and Imperial Camel Corps capture Magdhaba, northern Sinai, 1916.	**31 December** 3rd Battalion Royal Australian Regiment sails to South Vietnam on HMAS Sydney, 1967.
1 January The Office of Australian War Graves established, 1975.	**5 January** 80th anniversary of Australian 6th Division capturing Bardia, North Africa, 1941.	**9 January** Australian Light Horse captures Rafa on Egypt-Palestine border in advance on Palestine, 1917.
9 January 1RAR in Operation Crimp against Viet Cong tunnel complex, Vietnam, 1966.	**11 January** Australian Governor-General proclaims end of 11 year involvement in Vietnam, 1973.	**14 January** Australian 8th Battalion inflicts heavy losses on Japanese by ambush at Gemas, Malaya, 1942.
22 January Australian 6th Division captures Tobruk, North Africa, 1941.	**24 January** First contact between units of 1st Australian Task Force at Bien Hoa, South Vietnam, 1967.	**30 January** Tet Offensive begins during the Vietnam War, 1968.
2 February 3RAR recaptures Baria after Tet Offensive, South Vietnam, 1969.	**5 February** Rhonnda Vanzella and Glenn Keys appointed to Council of the Australian War Memorial.	**10 February** The Queen plants tree at Macquarie Place, Sydney, to mark beginning of Remembrance Driveway, 1954.
13 January New South Welshmen attacked by Boers at Prieska, 1900.	**13 February** National Servicemen's Day ("Nashos"), Last Post Ceremony at Australian War Memorial.	**14 February** Relief of Boer siege of Kimberley by NSW Mounted Rifles and Lancers and others, 1900.
15 February Fall of Singapore to the Japanese & surrender of British Commonwealth forces, 1942.	**19 February** First Japanese of many Japanese air attacks on Darwin, and northern Australia, 1942.	**25 February** 3RAR takes Hill 614 in Korean War, enabling UN forces to advance northwards, 1951.

The Military History Society of New South Wales Inc

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Sydney's leading forum for the discussion of New South Wales, Australian and world military history and heritage

From the Editor

Welcome to the Autumn 2021 issue of *Reconnaissance*.

Most Australians know little about the country's quite substantial military contribution to the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. Perhaps this is because much of it happened before federation. But they probably know at least one thing. That is the tragic-romantic story of outback horse-breaker cum bush poet Harry Morant, 'The Breaker', who along with fellow trooper Peter Handcock was executed by the British high command on 27 February 1902, allegedly for murdering Boer prisoners. The Morant case has been the subject of numerous books, documentaries, and, of course, the award-winning movie by Bruce Beresford. It has long been attended by controversy and continues to arouse strong passions to this day. Attitudes to the executions seem to shift back and forth according to latter-day feelings about Australian nationalism, the honouring of military heroes and war crimes. In any event, one of the most persistent and articulate defenders of Morant and Handcock (the third accused George Witton received a prison sentence) is barrister, historian and documentary-maker James Unkles, who has contributed the cover feature article for this *Reconnaissance*.

As James explains, in its end phase the Boer War degenerated into a brutal guerilla conflict. The accused Australians claimed they were issued orders by the British high command, including Commander-In-Chief Lord Kitchener, to execute prisoners, only to be later singled out as scapegoats when it became politically controversial. To some extent this remains clouded by uncertainty, but James rightly argues there is no doubt about another aspect. Morant, Handcock and Witton were denied due process under the law of the time and were subjected to a grossly unfair trial and appeal procedure. He outlines a compelling case for redress.

The massacre of British troops by Zulu warriors at Isandlwana in 1879 goes down as the worst disaster in British military history until the bloodbaths of World War I culminating on the Somme. In books about military stuff ups it tends to be filed under the category 'underestimating the enemy'. In a thorough examination of the encounter for *Reconnaissance*, Steve Hart shows that the British commander Lord Chelmsford simply could not imagine how natives equipped with spears, clubs and cow-hide shields stood a chance against disciplined modern infantry armed with the formidable Martini-Henry rifle. He failed to take elementary precautions and paid a terrible price in lives.

We also present another of Dr John Haken's compact snapshots of Australian military administration, this time covering various organisations and units created to draw women into civilian, active and ancillary service in wartime going back to the Boer War through to the world wars and after. These include familiar names like the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) and the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps (RAANC).

Finally we present another excellent round of book reviews – Joe Poprzeczny on the memoir of Yulia Zhukova, one of the famous Red Army women snipers of World War II; David Martin on Tony Matthew's book on the tragic conference at Evian in 1938 to save the Jews of Europe; Mark Moore Tom Lewis' argument that dropping of the atomic bomb in 1945 saved millions of lives; and I review Peter Edgar's contribution to the Australian Army Campaigns Series on the counter-attack at Villers-Bretonneux in April 1918, described by some as the country's greatest feat of arms.

John Muscat,
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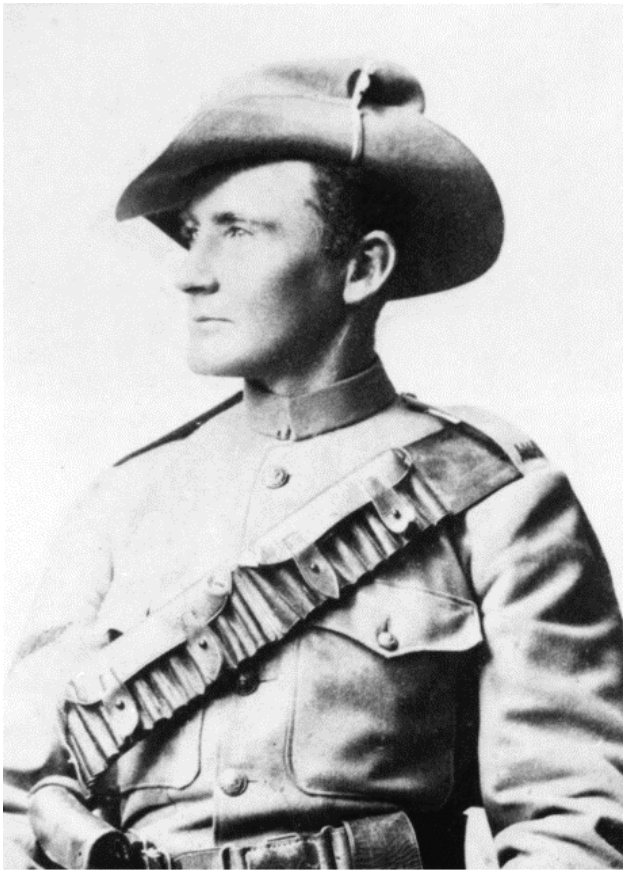
Cover Feature

Breaker Morant: The Case for a Pardon

■ James Unkles



Harry 'Breaker' Morant

Introduction

> "It does no good to act without the fullest inquiry and strictly on legal lines. A hasty judgment creates a martyr and unless military law is strictly followed, a sense of injustice having been done is the result". (1)

> "They were treated monstrously. Certainly by today's standards they were not given any of the human rights that international treaties require men facing the death penalty be given. But even by the standards of 1902 they were treated improperly, unlawfully". (2)

Australians have genuine regard and respect for their defence forces and allegations of war crimes are confronting. However, an equal injustice and affront to Australia's values enshrined in our democratic institutions and judicial independence is an abrogation of due legal process for political and other agendas.

Leo D'Angelo Fisher's insightful article on alleged ADF war crimes and its reflection on the failure of leadership in the ADF (3) presents an opportunity to balance the assessment of allegations of war crimes with the significance of the preservation and promotion of the rule of rule in ensuring accused persons enjoy the presumption of innocence and proof beyond reasonable doubt, and are treated in accordance with common and statutory law. Nothing less is unacceptable in a civilised society.

Leo D'Angelo Fisher rightly draws comment on the trial of Lieutenants Harry 'Breaker' Morant, Peter Hancock and George Witton, three Australian volunteers arrested, tried and sentenced for alleged war crimes during the Anglo-Boer War of 1902.

This controversial aspect of Australian military and legal history is also significant as it illustrates that the prosecution of alleged war crimes, then and now, can be polluted by another injustice – trial and sentencing not in strict accordance with the law and due process.

My article examines aspects of the Morant case, the errors in the administration of justice, the case for review and its relevance to the current war crimes investigation.

Harry 'Breaker' Morant

Because there has never been any doubt that Morant, Handcock and Witten were involved in

the shooting of prisoners, accusations they admitted to, the debate has focused entirely on the question of whether orders to that effect were given. No-one has objectively looked at the legality of the trial proceedings and whether the rule of law and trial procedures enshrined in the military and common law of 1902 were scrupulously adhered to, or ignored to achieve politically inspired outcomes.

Critics

To the detractors who argue that these men *got what they deserved*, my advocacy is *not* about excusing murder. It's about the sanctity of the rule of law and trial according to due process of 1902. The case I have mounted for review is relevant to the current situation regarding the SAS war crimes investigation, the sanctity of the rule of law, fair and lawful trial, and how a proven injustice can be remedied.

The Anglo-Boer War

The war between the British and two Dutch South African republics (the Anglo-Boer War) began on 11 October 1899 and lasted until 31 May 1902, when a peace treaty was signed. The bitter conflict that raged across the South African veldt was a war between the Boer population on one side and the might of the British Empire, keen to secure for itself the wealth of colonialism, gold and a strategic geographic location on the African continent.

Britain was determined to win the war, but failed to produce a decisive victory against a formidable insurgency. Finally, in order to settle the conflict, the Commander-In-Chief of the British Army, General Lord Horatio Kitchener, instigated brutal strategies to break Boer resistance and better fight an effective opponent. He introduced a scorched-earth policy of burning farms and crops, confiscating and destroying livestock, and imprisoning non-combatants, women, the elderly and children in concentration camps to remove them from the field, thus preventing logistic support and psychological comfort to Boer fighters. These policies were designed to strip the Boers of their resources and to break their will.

Lord Kitchener

Excesses and the brutal treatment of prisoners are synonymous with the history of human conflict and this war was no exception. Incidents of brutality, including summary executions, occurred on both sides. Lord Kitchener was desperate to end a war that had become politically and economically unpopular in Britain and turned to Australian volunteers, men who could ride and shoot like the Boers, to fight a guerilla war and live off the land.

The Bushveldt Carbineers were a unit that *played* the Boers at their own game and were very successful in combat. However, it was the use of summary executions to inflict reprisals on Boers for their summary murder of British soldiers, and theft of British uniforms and supplies, that resulted in an incident that still reverberates to this day – the arrest, trial and sentencing of three Australian volunteers, Lieutenants Morant,

Handcock and Witton for shooting twelve Boer prisoners.

Peter Handcock

The three Army volunteers claimed they had acted in good faith in following the orders of their British superiors, particularly Lord Kitchener. Morant and Handcock were executed on 27 February 1902 and Witton's death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment. Witton was released in 1904 following a determined campaign for his freedom led by the Australian Government, British MPs including Winston Churchill, and his lawyer Isaac Isaacs KC, MP (who eventually became Governor-General of Australia and Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia). A feature of the campaign was a petition authored by Isaacs and signed by 80,000 Australians.

Critics of the accused say they were lawfully convicted of serious war crimes and deserved the sentences they received. On the other hand, the descendants of these men and others insist that Morant, Handcock and Witton were scapegoats for the crimes of their British superiors while British counterparts were not prosecuted for similar offences. It is also alleged that Lord Kitchener conspired to deny the men fair trials according to the laws of 1902 and deliberately kept the proceedings from the Australian Government to avoid interference in the trial and sentencing processes. While the men admitted to shooting Boer prisoners, they had a right to be tried strictly in accordance with the laws of 1902 and to exercise their right of appeal.

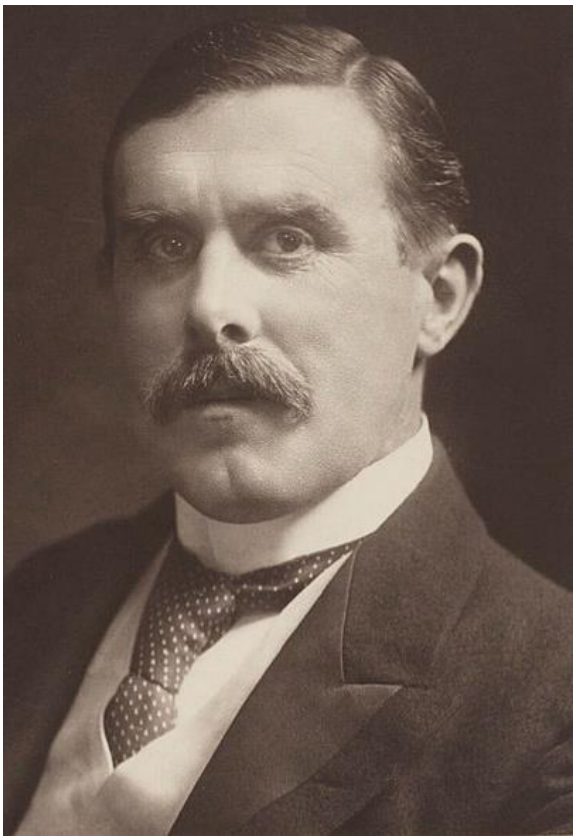
In 2009, I commenced a review of the trials and sentences of these men and completed a detailed analysis. I uncovered new evidence of orders to take no prisoners, the use of the customary law of reprisal to inflict revenge on Boer fighters and serious procedural errors made in the investigation, courts-martial and sentencing of the accused.

Denial of Right of Appeal and Military Redress of Grievance

Of particular concern was denial of the accused's right of appeal to the British Crown and Lord Kitchener's conflict of interest, having issued orders to take no prisoners but implicated as a potential defence witness and authority confirming the sentences of death. Evidence also suggests that Lord Kitchener misled senior Crown officers and the Secretary of State for War, William St John Brodrick, by failing to detail recommendations for mercy made by the trying officers, and failing to provide the Crown with a complete set of the trial transcripts as required by law. Lord Kitchener also acted oppressively by absenting himself once he had confirmed the death sentences, thereby denying the men an appeal to the Crown and to state a military redress of grievance.

Lord Kitchener also failed to advise the Australian Government of the arrest and trial of these three Australians thereby denying the

Australian Government the opportunity to intervene and plead for clemency before Morant and Handcock were executed.



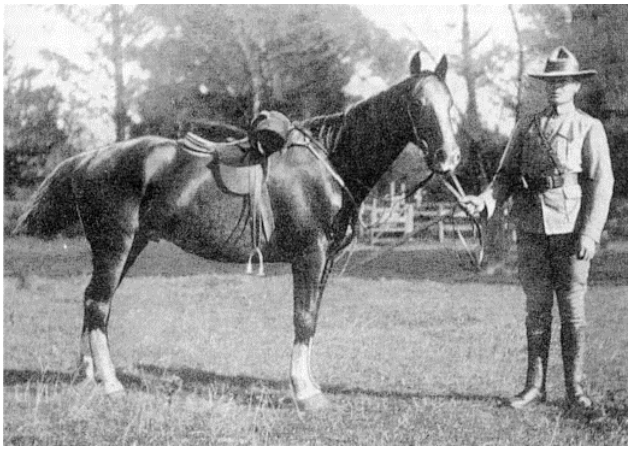
William St John Brodrick

Major James Francis Thomas – Defence Counsel

I also focused on the writings of the Australian solicitor from Tenterfeld, Major James Francis Thomas, who inadvertently found himself at the centre of this controversy when he was asked to defend the accused.

Major Thomas was given only one day to prepare the defence of persons accused of serious charges tried over a period of about one month. In contrast, the prosecution had three months to prepare its cases and unlimited resources to assist in their preparation. Major Thomas had no such assistance, and had to act as both solicitor and counsel. He was further refused an adjournment so that he could better prepare a proper defence, a matter that was provided for in trial regulations, but refused in this instance by Military Command.

Thomas was also denied the use of the telegraph to seek assistance from the Australian Government. The proceedings were conducted in utmost secrecy and Lord Kitchener prohibited any contact between the accused, Major Thomas, their relatives and the Australian Government. Major Thomas protested the innocence of his clients following the execution of Morant and Handcock and waged a campaign in Australia for an inquiry into the cases. His writings have provided me with significant detail of how he and his clients were treated by the British military, and why he thought the three Australians had been singled out for prosecution in deference to British soldiers. He also complained that Lord Kitchener had deliberately absented himself to deny him an opportunity to lodge an appeal in the few hours before the execution.



George Witton as a Bushveldt Carbineer

Another source of evidence is a book published by George Witton in 1907. The book, *Scapegoats of the Empire: The true story of Breaker Morant's Bushveldt Carbineers*, provides a firsthand account of the circumstances of the shootings, the trials that followed and the appalling actions of the British Command to ensure these men could not exercise, through Major Thomas, a

redress of grievance and an appeal to the British Crown. (4)

I have used extracts of the trial transcripts quoted in the book to assist with the case for judicial review and pardons. These men were not tried in accordance with military law and procedure of 1902, and suffered great injustice as a result. The convictions were unsafe and the sentences illegal, as appeal was denied and due process seriously compromised.

There were flaws in the arrest, investigation, trial and sentencing of the accused Australians. The following issues were identified:

1. **Denial of natural justice – investigation.** On or about 22 October 1901, Morant, Handcock and Witton were arrested and placed in solitary confinement over allegations of shooting Boer prisoners. A Court of Inquiry commenced on 16 October 1901. The accused were denied details of the investigation and given no opportunity to seek legal advice or cross-examine those who gave evidence at the investigation or conduct their own inquiries and arrange defence witnesses. The denial of legal advice continued until the evening before their trials commenced on 16 January 1902. The lack of time to consult legal counsel was a gross injustice noting the seriousness of the charges.

2. **Denial of fairness to prepare defence cases for trial.** The prosecution had three months to prepare cases against the accused before trials commenced in January 1902. This was in stark contrast to Morant, Handcock and Witton who were denied the right to consult legal counsel until 15 January 1902. They were granted one day's preparation before trial to seek legal advice on serious allegations and complex legal issues from defence counsel Major James Thomas, with whom they had no previous contact. Their confinement and limited time meant they were unable to prepare a defence, including locating and interviewing witnesses. This prevented them, in effect, from mounting a defence to charges of murder. This denial of fairness was a serious breach of military law and procedure under the Manual of Military Law, 1899.

3. **Condonation.** The application of condonation should have caused pardons to be granted to the accused at the time of the trials or after their convictions but before sentences had been carried out. Condonation arose from the call to service during a Boer attack on Pietersburg on 23 January 1902 and again on 31 January 1902. Condonation should also have been recognised as a plea in bar due to the offences being condoned or pardoned by a competent military authority.

4. **Trial errors by Judge Advocate.** The members of the courts-martial were not properly directed to a competent standard by the Judge Advocate on issues including:

    - The lawful excuse of obedience to superior orders, evidence of provocation, evidence of the accused's limited military service;

    - The status of the accused as volunteers and their limited education and ignorance of military law;

    - The significance of mitigating circumstances and character evidence; and

    - Several failures in trial procedures and directions on matters including sufficient time and resources to

prepare a defence to serious charges of murder and to ensure the accused were not unfairly restricted in their rights to a fair trial.

5. **Review of convictions and sentences.** Lord Kitchener, the confirming authority of convictions and sentences, failed to, amongst other things:

    - Inform the accused of the verdicts and sentences within a reasonable time so they could seek legal counsel on their rights of review through the military redress of wrongs procedure or petition the King;

    - Ensure that he was available in Pretoria after he had confirmed the sentences and convictions on 25 February 1902 to hear pleas for mercy by the accused and their counsel;

    - Ensure the accused were permitted to contact their relatives and / or representatives of the Australian Government to seek clemency on their behalf (this failure was particularly cruel and unjustified); and

    - Ensure the accused were not prejudiced in their defence or suffered injustice during the investigation and trial proceedings.

6. **Unsafe verdicts.** In all the circumstances, the convictions and sentences were unsafe.

The evidence was considered by former Australian Attorney-General, Robert McClelland. In 2011 he announced that these men were not tried according to law. However, his decision to make his concerns known to the British Government was not followed through.

In a significant step towards judicial review, I put the evidence before the Victorian Supreme Court on 20 July 2013. Although it carried no judicial standing, the moot hearing was conducted professionally by senior counsel who acted for the Crown and the accused. The case was heard by senior barristers Andrew Kirkham, RFD, QC and Gary Hevey. They found unequivocally that the men had not had proper trials and had suffered a substantial and fatal miscarriage of justice. Those interested can view the hearing on line at *www.breakermorant.com*.

Opinions of Senior Legal Counsel and Community Leaders

Renowned and respected human rights lawyer, judge and author Geoffrey Mr Robertson AO, QC gave an opinion on the matter supported by former Chief Justice of the NSW Supreme Court, Sir Laurence Street, AC, KCMG, KStJ, QC and former Deputy Prime Minister, Tim Fischer, AO. They agreed the case represents a gross miscarriage of justice and is deserving of independent inquiry.

Calls for review have also come from other notable judicial officers, including Dr Howard Zelling (dec), former Chief Justice of South Australia, Charles Francis QC (dec), David Denton SC, Judge Sandy Street SC and MPs Alex Hawke, Greg Hunt, Tony Smith and other MPs who were members of the House of Representatives Petitions Committee. Their calls for judicial review cannot be ignored.

Respecting Australian Values

Of the matters of justice that confront government, none are more important than Australia's defining principle of being a fair and equitable country, embracing democratic values and principles. Foremost is Australia's tradition of trial according to due process to ensure that those appearing before courts are presumed innocent and entitled to a fair and unbiased

hearing in accordance with statute and common law.

For 118 years the issue of whether Lieutenants Morant, Handcock and Witton were tried according to British law and treated fairly when convicted and sentenced for shooting Boer prisoners has been one of Australia's most enduring controversies.

The execution of Morant and Handcock on 27 February 1902 and the sentencing of Witton to life imprisonment continues to ignite passionate debate in Britain, South Africa and Australia, not least among their Australian descendants.

Boer commandos

The brutality of the Boer War in British military history is something many, particularly in London, would rather forget. In the midst of that struggle, the trial of these three volunteers highlighted reprehensible tactics ordered by British officers, including reprisal through summary execution as a means of prosecuting the war.

It has been argued convincingly with persuasive evidence that the Australians shot twelve Boers while acting under the orders of senior British regular army officers, including Lord Kitchener. Putting that aside, the legitimacy of the process used to try these men was illegal and improper, and was done to hide the criminal culpability of British officers. Put simply, the accused were not afforded the rights of a person facing serious criminal charges enshrined in the military law and procedure of 1902.

The opinion of Minister Greg Hunt, MP should ensure the injustice is addressed:

> Well my view is *that any Australian government at any time should seek final resolution*, and if we are elected then I will continue to work within the parliament to see that outcome. Well I think the concern is that two Australians were executed in a summary fashion without justice. Now none of this excuses what was clearly a heinous act in relation to the prisoners under care, but it is time, in my judgment, for a proper independent inquiry. That may not change the decision of the court, it may reverse the decision, or it may say that there were mitigating circumstances that these were actions taken under orders. But there was no justice, there was a summary execution after a sham trial and there deserves to be a full trial. This will not ever excuse their actions, but similarly it is clear that the actions of the colonial administration of those who were running the Boer conflict were equally reprehensible. And if there is a stain on the historic record we need to address it. (5)

Mr Hunt's assessment is supported by noted jurist, Sir Laurence Street, AC, KCMG, KStJ, QC, former Chief Justice of NSW (dec):

> I think the British Government should intervene and appoint an enquiry, the outcome of which I'm sure would be that the conviction should not be allowed to stand and would quash the convictions. This is an appalling affront to any general notions of justice, and an appalling injustice to the remaining living man. This was an exercise of the administration of criminal justice which sadly miscarried. No judge with any ownership of the criminal justice system in his jurisdiction,

> or her jurisdiction, could tolerate ... something of this sort going unremedied. This is crying out for judicial intervention. (6)

The Australian Parliament – House of Representatives

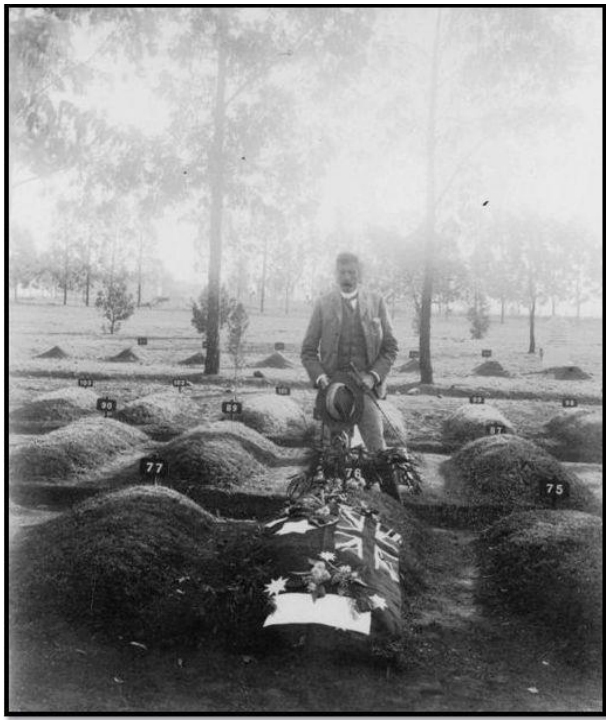
These opinions were reflected in an historic motion that was drafted by me and moved by Scott Buchholz MP in the House of Representatives on 12 February 2018. The motion concluded that the men were not tried according to law and expressed sympathy and regret to the descendants. The motion was compelling and reflected Mr Buchholz's commitment to see justice done:

> Lieutenants Morant and Handcock were the first and last Australians executed for war crimes, on 27 February 1902. The process used to try these men was fundamentally flawed. They were not afforded the rights of an accused person facing serious criminal charges enshrined in military law in 1902. Today, I recognise the cruel and unjust consequences and express my deepest sympathy to the descendants'. (7)

On another occasion in 2010, Julia Irwin, MP, Chair of the House of Representatives Petitions Committee, concluded after the Committee had reviewed the case*:*

> there appears to be some level of agreement across these two camps that the accused men had little opportunity to prepare a defence against the charges. This petition argues that there are indeed 'questions and concerns' over 'fairness, legal process and sentencing' at the court-martial, and it is on these grounds, the petition suggests, that the cases against Morant, Handcock and Witton should be reviewed. (8)

The motion and finding of the Petition Committee are compelling and cannot be understated. They represent historic developments in the review of this controversial case in Australian military and legal history, and a conclusion that the descendants of these men deserve justice.



James Thomas at Morant & Handcock grave

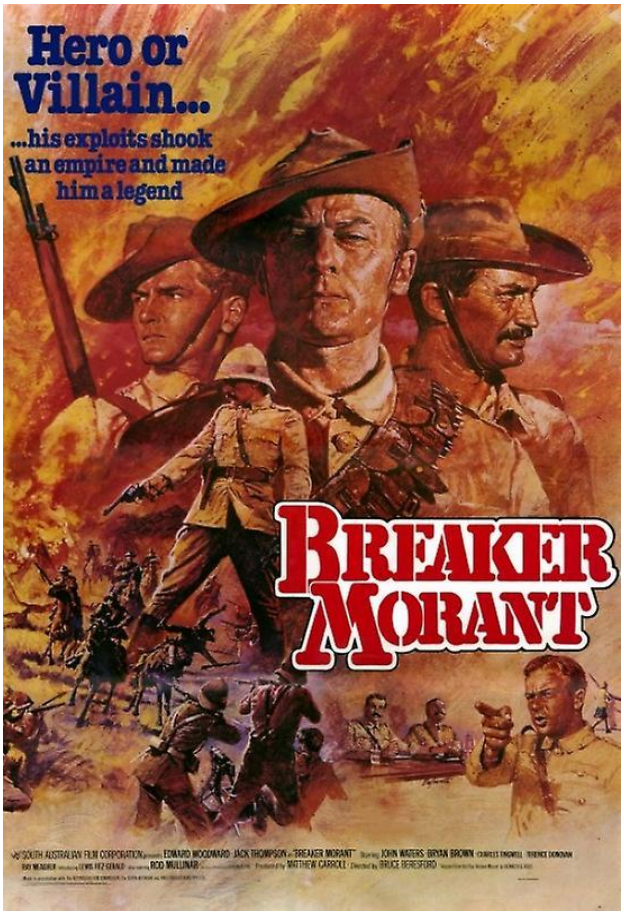
Conclusion

As Australia enters the landscape of assessing and trying alleged war crimes by Australian SAS soldiers, it is a salutary opportunity to remind us that the outrage of perceived war crimes can be accompanied by equal outrage in the abuse of human rights during the arrest, detention, trial and sentencing of offenders. This applied in 1902 and today judicial and government officers must ensure it remains the focus of their conduct.

I remain committed to having the Morant matter independently examined and justice delivered posthumously, so that Major Thomas' work can be completed and the descendants of these men can rest knowing the injustice been addressed

and the case resolved. Corrupted trial process makes martyrs and this is an example.

The passing of time and the fact that Morant, Handcock and Witton are deceased does not diminish errors in the administration of justice. Injustices in times of war are inexcusable and it takes vigilance to right wrongs, to honour those unfairly treated and to demonstrate respect for the rule of law. This matter involves injustice and how we respond is a test of our values and treatment of these Australian veterans. Their descendants and those who respect the rule of law await justice and that must be put above all other considerations.



Poster for Bruce Beresford movie

The words of Tim Fischer, AC, former Deputy PM (dec) aptly addresses the injustice:

> Because two great wrongs were done to both Breaker Morant and Peter Handcock – absolute wrongs – and also a wrong towards George Witton. And this goes to the moral values and fabric of a nation. We know these wrongs were done, do we do nothing about it, or do we in fact seek to at least ... [since] we can't reinstate life, correct the formal record by one method or another here or in Great Britain. (9)

War Crimes Investigation – Going Forward

There are lessons to be learnt from the Morant matter in light of the current war crimes investigation. Will the process of fair trials be rigorously applied without prejudice to any SAS accused? Will our political leaders and senior ADF leaders, including CDF and CA act to ensure scapegoats are not made of junior personnel to cover the alleged complicit actions and failures of commanders and leaders in Canberra? We will wait and see what eventuates, but scrutiny by the ADF, government and the veterans community must be resolute and call out perceived injustices.

End notes

(1) Lord Kitchener cable sent to Secretary of State on 6 April 1902 relevant to the case for review regarding Breaker Morant.
(2) Geoffrey Robertson, AO, QC, International Jurist and Human Rights advocate, extract of interview with James Unkles, 2013.
(3) Leo D'Angelo Fisher, *War-crime allegations are confronting but they may lead to welcome reforms,* Australian Veteran News, 7 June 2020.
(4) Witton, George, *Scapegoats of the Empire, the true story of Breaker Morant's Bushveldt Carbineers,* Angus and Robertson, 1982.
(5) Greg Hunt, extract of interview with James Unkles 2013.

(6) Sir Laurence Street AC, KCMG, KStJ, QC extract of interview with James Unkles, 2013.
(7) Parliamentary Debates, Hansard, House of Representatives Motion, Scott Buchholz, MP, 12 February 2018.
(8) Extract from Hansard, House of Representatives, 15 March 2010.
(9) Tim Fischer, AC extract of interview with James Unkles 2013.

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The Battle of Isandlwana

■ Steve Hart

Introduction

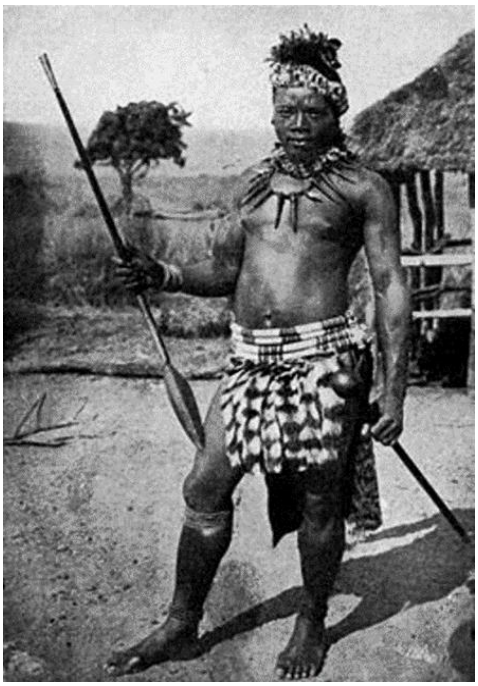
This is the first of three articles about a number of brief but bloody battles in South Africa in 1879. Like any other conflict, the formal act of war was preceded by events and circumstances that precipitated the hostilities, as was the case when colonialist settlers occupied lands of the people of a country. Recall for example, the Spanish conquest of South America, the American and Canadian suppression of its native tribes, even our own frontier wars. In the case of the Anglo-Zulu war, these influencing events percolated over a number of years, so it is necessary to spend some time reviewing the relevant background.

Contextual History

Who were the Zulus?

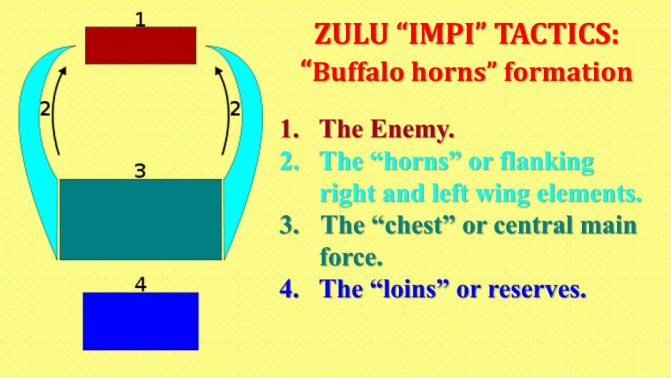
The Zulu was a group of Nguni speaking clans, united in the early 1810s under a local leader, Shaka. They were basically farmers and graziers. Each clan was led by a chief supported by headmen, called indunas. The Clan Chiefs were often inter-related and although often autocratic, even despotic, they were guided by a council to advise on administrative, judicial, etc., matters.

Boys were initiated at adolescence and served in *age sets*, each consisting of a unit (*Impi)* of the Zulu army. These units were stationed away from home, under the King's control. Permission to marry was given by the king, but applicable to *age set* as a whole. Cetshwayo, the King of the Zulus at the time of the British invasion, was wary of the encroaching white settlement but aware of British military might. Ergo, he was conciliatory and sought negotiation on conflicting interests.



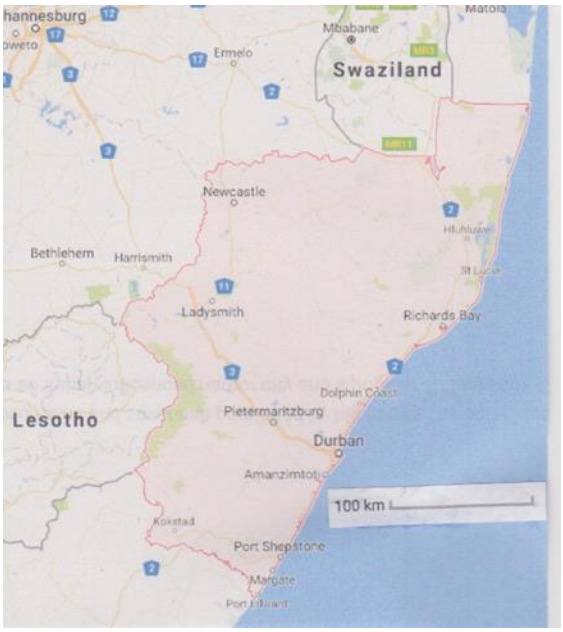
The Zulu army was essentially a militia force, mobilized in response to threats. It had limited logistic capacity and its warriors were available for short term spells only. Primary weapons were clubs and spears. Organised in formations known as the "Impi", (a generic term that could mean a raiding party of 100 or a horde of 10,000), its structure and tactics having evolved over decades of internecine warfare and contributing to the rise of the powerful Zulu nation under one king**.** The picture above depicts a Zulu warrior armed with the *iklwa* stabbing spear (*assegai*) and *iwisa* club (*knoberrie).* His kilt is of genet tails.

Zulu Impi Tactics



In battle, the Zulu typically took the offensive, deploying in the well-known 'buffalo horns' formation as shown in this illustration. The 'horns' were deployed to encircle and pin the enemy and generally consisted of younger, greener troops. The task of the 'chest' was to deliver the coup de grace and was mainly composed of seasoned fighters. The reserves were used to exploit success or reinforce elsewhere. Encirclement tactics are not unique in warfare but what was unique about the Zulu was the degree of organization and consistency with which they used these tactics, and the speed at which they executed them.

Finally, to orientate the reader, this illustration shows the full extent of the area occupied by the Zulus prior to the invasion of white settlers. The point shown as Durban was originally the Bay of Natal, from which the province of Natal was subsequently named.



Britain's interest in South Africa

Britain effectively seized the region around the vital port of Cape Town in 1814 from the Dutch. The Royal navy was delighted with the anchorage of the port and its strategically important route to India was obvious to all British statesmen. Early deterioration with the Boers between 1835 and 1845 resulted in the so-called Great Trek which saw the Voortrekkers move north to occupy the fertile land of Natal. Increased British immigration followed and in 1875 a confederation of South African states was proposed by the Colonial Secretary, Lord Carnarvon, along the lines of the Canadian Confederation of 1867. The move was further motivated with the discovery of diamonds and the intoxicating possibility of other material wealth to be extracted. But the complicated ethnic mix in Southern Africa would make federation a much more difficult proposition than with other white settlers like Canada or Australia. So, how did the conflict with the Zulus originate?

The man chosen to implement Carnarvon's imperialist scheme was Sir Henry Bartle Frere who was appointed as High Commissioner for South Africa. He was perceived as the ideal candidate having suppressed the great Indian Mutiny of 1857 in his province and in the

neighbouring Punjab. On arrival, he found events were conspiring against his mission. There were native uprisings; the colonists were unsympathetic to federation; and the Transvaal Boers were growing rebellious after the annexation of their land by the British.

Frere regarded the spear-fidgeting Zulu tribes as a standing menace whose elimination would enhance federation. Although the British government was strongly opposed to conflict with the Zulus, Frere was prepared to take responsibility on himself for starting a war. He gambled that the conflict would be quickly accomplished and that overwhelming British superiority in firepower would make for a comparatively bloodless victory. He concocted a provocation and presented a 13-point ultimatum to Cetshwayo, including a demand that the Zulus disarm and become subject to British law. Given a month to comply, and without any response from Cetshwayo, Frere ordered the commander of the British Forces to proceed with a pre-planned invasion of Zululand.

The commander of the British forces in the colony was the newly promoted Lt General Frederick Thesiger, soon to become Lord Chelmsford. He was educated at Eton where he absorbed a deep sense of national superiority – that the English were self-evidently the race most qualified to rule the world, a concept they found inescapable in the decades following Waterloo. Convinced that the Zulus posed an active threat to Transvaal and Natal, he sought reinforcements from London, but they continued to press for options of peace as opposed to war. However, Westminster eventually agreed to dispatch two infantry battalions and two companies of Royal Engineers to the Cape – sufficient to defend the Cape against any Zulu invasion, but insufficient to mount an invasion.

In the pre-attack briefings and intelligence gathering phase, he rejected the advice of the Burgers and Boers who had fought the Zulus in past wars, that any army fighting Zulus should laager at every halt after crossing the border, especially when stopping for breakfast and dinner. Chelmsford response was "Oh, British troops are all right; we do not need to laager – we have a different formation." It had been 40 years since settlement when the British and Boers had last fought with the Zulus in 1838. Chelmsford placed great faith in the Martini-Henry rifle, the first version of which was introduced into service in 1871. The robust weapon utilised a falling block, self-cocking, lever operated, single-shot action, using metallic cartridge ammunition. Experienced infantrymen could discharge 10-12 rounds of aimed fire every minute but were only issued with 70 rounds per person. Consequently, a reliable and nearby resupply organisation was required during periods of heavy fighting.

Grand Strategy

Chelmsford initially planned a five-pronged invasion of Zululand consisting of over 15,000 troops in five columns and designed to encircle the Zulu army and force it to fight as he was concerned that the Zulus would avoid battle, slip around the invaders and over the Tulega River, and strike at Natal. Chelmsford settled on three invading columns with the main centre column, now consisting of some 7,800 men comprising the previously called No. 3 Column, commanded by the Colonel of the 24th Richard Glynn, and Durnford's No. 2 Column, both under his direct command. He moved his troops from Pietermaritzburg to a forward camp at Helpmekaar, past Greytown and the massive build-up of troops there around the end of November was not lost on the Zulu community on the other side of the border. It was a clear

indication that the red coats are coming. On 9 January 1879, the British force moved to Rorke's drift, and early on 11 January commenced crossing the Buffalo River into Zululand. Meanwhile, Pearson's No.1 Column had advanced along the coast road and was moving north towards Eshowe on a track that is now Route 66. A third column under Colonel Evelyn Wood entered Zululand to the north of Rorke's Drift and is not considered further in this paper. The initial entry of all three columns was unopposed.

The efficient Zulu intelligence service quickly recognised this strategy from the slow buildup of the British forces in the weeks preceding the invasion. This permitted Cetshwayo to develop his own defensive strategy, which was simple enough. Troops would be assigned to check the British flanks, but the main response would be directed against the centre. In the north, the Oulusi clan and Prince Mbilini's marauders would form the basis of the defence against Wood's column. In the south, towards the coast, Pearson's right flank column might be delayed by those elements which had remained near the border to watch the British advance, reinforced by a contingent from the troops gathered noisily at Ulundi. We may cover the fate of these conflicts in a later article.

Disposition of Troops Prior to Battle

The backbone the of the British force under Chelmsford forward consisted of 12 regular infantry companies; six each of the 1st and 2nd battalions, 24th Regiment of foot (later the 2nd Warwickshire Regiment), which were hardened and reliable troops. In addition, there were approximately 2,500 local auxiliaries of the Natal Native Contingent many of which were exiled or refugee Zulus. They were led by European officers but considered generally of poor quality by the British as they were prohibited from using their traditional fighting techniques and inadequately trained in the European methods as well as being indifferently armed. Also, there were some irregular colonial calvary units, a detachment of artillery consisting of six field guns and several Congreve rockets. Adding on wagon drivers, camp followers and servants, there were more than 4,000 men in the No. 3 Column, not including Durnford's No. 2 Column.

Because of the urgency required to complete their scheme, Bartle Frere and Chelmsford began the invasion during the rainy season. This had the consequence of slowing the British advance to a crawl. The British had timed the invasion to coincide with the harvest intending to catch the Zulu warrior-farmers dispersed. Fortuitously for Cetshwayo, the Zulu had already begun to assemble at the Ulundi, as it did every year for the *First Fruits* ceremony when all warriors were duty-bound to report to the regimental barracks near Ulundi, about 40 kilometres east of Isandlwana. When news of the multipronged invasion reached Cetshwayo, he sent the 24,000 strong main Zulu Impi from near present-day Ulundi, on 17 January, crossed the White Umfolozi River with the following command to his warriors: "March slowly, and at dawn eat up the red soldiers."

On the 18th, some 4,000 warriors were detached from the main body to attack Pearson's No. 1 column near Eshowe. The remaining 20,000 Zulus left camp and headed west towards Isandlwana, with overnight camps *en route*. Finally, on the 21st they moved into a valley north of Isandlwana, where they remained concealed, planning to attack the British on the 23rd, but they were discovered by a scouting party on 22 January. Under the local commander, the Zulu army had reached its position in easy

stages. They were preceded by a screening force of mounted troops supported by parties of warriors 200-400 strong, tasked with preventing the main columns from being sighted. The speed of the Zulu advance compared to the British is marked. The Zulu Impi had advanced over 50 kilometres in five days while Chelmsford had only advanced slightly over 16 kilometres in 10 days.

Lord Chelmsford

The British under Chelmsford pitched camp at Isandlwana on 20 January but did not follow standing orders to entrench. No laager (circling of the wagons) was formed. Chelmsford did not see the need of the laager, stating, "it will take a week to make ". Perhaps the stony ground discouraged entrenchment but no breastworks were built, or obstacles placed to slow an enemy attack. Several of the experienced officers of the 24th expressed concern. But the main reason for the failure to take defensive precautions appears to have been that the British commander severely underestimated the Zulu capacities. On the 12 January, Chelmsford's men fought a brief but bloody battle in a valley north-east of Isandlwana. Their success in this short encounter emboldened them in their belief of their greater fighting capabilities. The experience of numerous colonial wars fought in Africa was that the massed firepower of relatively small bodies of professional European troops armed with modern firearms and artillery, and supplemented by local allies and levies, would march out to meet the natives whose ragged, badly equipped armies would put up a brave struggle, but would, in the end, succumb.

Chelmsford believed his force of over 4000, including 2,000 British infantry armed with Martini-Henry rifles, as well as artillery, had more than sufficient firepower to overwhelm any attack by Zulus armed only with spears, cowhide shields and a few ancient firearms such as Brown Bess muskets. Indeed, with a British force of this size, it was the logistical arrangements that occupied Chelmsford's thoughts. Rather than any fear that the camp might be attacked, his main concern was managing the huge number of wagons and oxen required to support his forward advance.

Once he had established the camp at Isandlwana, Chelmsford sent out two battalions of the Natal Native Contingent to scout ahead. They skirmished with elements of a Zulu force which Chelmsford believed to be the vanguard of the main enemy army. Such was the confidence in British military training and firepower that he divided his force, taking about 2,500 men, including half of the British infantry contingent, and set out towards the east to find the main Zulu force with the intention of bringing them to battle, so as to achieve a decisive victory. It never occurred to Chelmsford that the Zulus he saw were diverting him from their main force.

Chelmsford left behind five companies, around 70 to 80 fighting men in each, of the 1st Battalion and one stronger company of around 150 men from the 2nd Battalion of the 24th to

guard the camp, under the command of Brevet Lt-Col Henry Pulleine. Pulleine's orders were to defend the camp and wait for further instructions to support the general as and when called upon. Pulleine also had around 500 men of the Natal Native Contingent and approximately 200 local mounted irregulars. He also had two artillery pieces, with around 70 men of the Royal Artillery. In total, some 1,300 men and two guns were left to defend the camp.

Henry Pulleine

Pulleine, left in the command of the rear position, was an administrator with no experience of front-line command on a campaign. Nevertheless, he commanded a strong force, particularly the six veteran regular infantry companies, which were experienced at colonial warfare. The mounted vedettes, cavalry scouts, patrolling some 11 kilometres from camp reported at 7:00 am that groups of Zulus, numbering around 4000, men could be seen. Further reports arrived to Pulleine during the early morning, each reporting movements, both large and small, of Zulus. There was speculation among the officers whether these troops were intending to march against Chelmsford's rear or towards the camp itself.

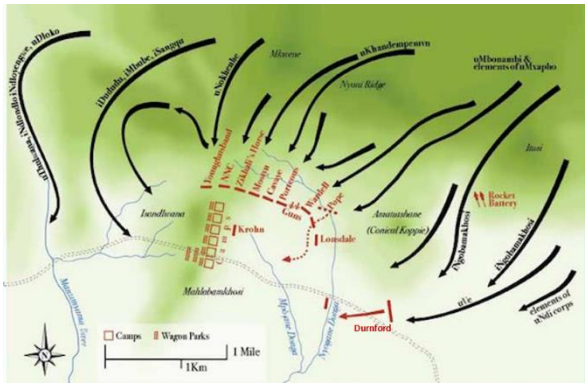
At 10:30am, Colonel Anthony Durnford arrived from Rorke's drift with five troops of the Natal Native Horse and a rocket battery. This brought the issue of command to the fore, because Durnford was senior and by tradition would have assumed command. However, he did not over-rule Pulleine's dispositions. But Durnford found that the situation had changed since Chelmsford's departure; Pulleine reported that a large number of Zulus had appeared after dawn on the skyline of the ridge to the north of the camp, much closer to Isandlwana, on the British left. They had retired from sight, and Pulleine had lacked the mounted troops to investigate further. The two men assessed that this force may be moving against Chelmsford's rear. Durnford asked for a company of the 24th, but Pulleine was reluctant to agree since his orders had been specifically to defend the camp.

In the absence of any orders to the contrary, Durnford decided to follow up these movements. He split his own command into two and – leaving Pulleine in the camp – rode off about 10:30 am onto the northern heights. One of his detachments spotted Zulu foragers in the distance and gave chase; cresting a ridge they suddenly found themselves looking down into the entire Zulu army camped beyond. It is understood that for political and religious factors (it was the new moon, unfitting for an engagement in battle), the Zulu commander had decided to delay his attack until the 23rd but the sudden discovery made that impossible. Without waiting for his orders, his Impi began to press forward toward Isandlwana, driving Durnford's men back and deploying across a wide area in the traditional 'chest and horns' formation.

Chelmsford had underestimated the disciplined, well led, well-motivated and confident Zulu. The failure to secure an effective defensive position, the poor intelligence on the location of the main Zulu army, Chelmsford's decision to split his forces in half, and the Zulus' tactical exploitation of the terrain and the weakness in the British formation, all combined to prove catastrophic for the troops at Isandlwana. In contrast, the Zulus

responded to the unexpected discovery of their camp with an immediate and spontaneous advance. Even though the commanding indunas would lose control over the advance, warriors' training allowed the Zulu troops to form their standard attack formation on the run, their battle line deployed in reverse of its intended order.

The Battle



The Zulu army was commanded by a number of senior indunas, some directly related to Cetshwayo. While Chelmsford was in the field seeking them, the entire Zulu army had outmanoeuvred him, moving behind his force with the intention of attacking the British Army on the 23rd. Pulleine had received reports of large forces of Zulus throughout the morning of the 22nd from 8:00 am on. Vedettes had observed Zulus on the hills to the left front, and Lt Chard, while he was at the camp, observed a large force of several thousand Zulu moving to the British left around the hill of Isandlwana. Pulleine sent word to Chelmsford, which was received by the general between 9:00 am and 10:00 am.

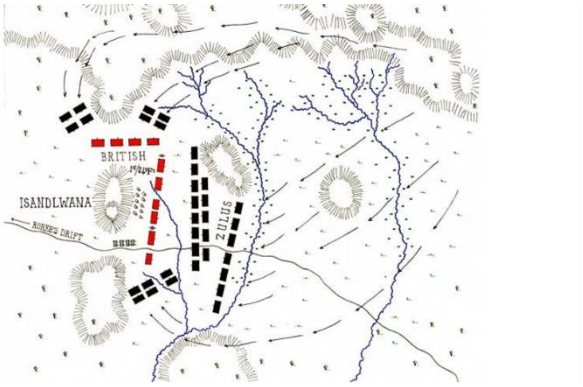
As mentioned earlier, battle was triggered when the main Zulu force was discovered at around 10:00 am by men of Durnford's troop of scouts, who chased a number of Zulus into a valley, only then seeing most of the 20,000 men of the main enemy force sitting in total silence. The exact location of this valley has never been agreed by historians, but it was probably no more than some 11 km from the British camp and nearly 20 km to the north-west of where Chelmsford was searching for them. Having been discovered the Zulu force leapt to the offensive. Durnford's men began a fighting retreat back to its formation and a message was sent to warn Pulleine.

The Zulu attack, beginning around noon, then developed in the traditional horns and chest of the buffalo, with the aim of encircling the British position. When Pulleine was advised that the Zulu presence, he could not, from his position at the foot of Isandlwana, see their approach and he pushed out his men in a thin screen which guarded the approaches to the camp but without being fully aware of the extent of the Zulu attack. As the flanking Zulu 'horns' drove back Durnford's men on both sides, the central chest began to spill over the ridge-line and descend towards Pulleine's position. Pulleine pulled his men back about 50 metres to higher ground and for the first couple of hours after the attack began, the disciplined British volleys pinned down the Zulu centre, inflicting some casualties and causing the advance to stall. Indeed, morale remained high within the British line. The Martini-Henry rifle was a powerful weapon and the men were experienced. Additionally, shellfire of the Royal Artillery forced some Zulu regiments to take cover behind the reverse slope of a hill but later reports indicated that the artillery fire was erratic and many of the fuses of the shrapnel shells unpredictable. But the defensive line was both thin and extended and the Zulu attack too concentrated. The whole British line was about 3 kilometres long from Young-Husband's company on the left to Scott on the conical hill to the east and facing north and north-east as shown in the above illustration. There was a gap of about 800 to 900 metres between Lonsdale's company and Durnford's stand further downstream. Pulleine ordered Pope's company to withdraw to cover the gap to protect the right flank, now under real threat.

Durnford's men, upon meeting elements of the Zulu centre and left horn, had retreated to a donga, a dried-out watercourse, on the British right flank where they formed a defensive line. The Rocket Battery under Durnford's command,

which was not mounted and dropped behind the rest of the force, was isolated and overrun very early in the engagement. The two battalions of native troops were in Durnford's line; while all the officers and NCOs carried rifles, only one in 10 in the ranks was armed with muzzle-loading muskets with limited ammunition and many of them started to leave the battlefield at this point. After prolonged heavy fighting, Durnford's force was running out of ammunition; men were sent back for replenishment but were refused ammunition from the 1/24th wagons, not being able to find their own. As the Impi attack strengthened, Durnford abandoned his position when he ran out of ammunition and made for the camp to form a new line in front of the tents as the officers went in search of ammunition. But Durnford's withdrawal exposed the flank of Pope's company of the 2/24th, which was overrun relatively quickly. This imperiled the whole defensive line, with ammunition not reaching Durnford's men and not coming forward quickly enough.

Final defensive positions



With his own flank now exposed, Pulleine attempted to withdraw his line towards the tents. The regulars' retreat was performed with order and discipline and the men of the 24th conducted a fighting withdrawal into the camp. But all this was too late. As the companies fell back, the Zulus rose up and charged, preventing the British from forming a new line and pushing individual red-coat companies through the tents. As the 24th tried to make the stand on the nek below Isandlwana Hill, the right horn – which had passed down the valley unseen behind them – emerged to attack them in the rear. Those of the Native Horse who could, rode away, bereft of ammunition. Some 85 Europeans reached Herlpmakaar. But the 24th fought to the bitter end at Isandlwana. When their ammunition ran out, they fought with bayonets all in squares until the Zulus finally overcame them by sheer weight of numbers. Only two bandsmen and a groom of the 24th survived. Three serving with the rocket battery and four with the mounted infantry had also survive.

An officer in advance from Chelmsford's force was about 5 miles from the camp when the Impi was discovered. He approached the camp but his battalion was of uncertain calibre and as such, retired. He gave this eyewitness account of the final stages of the battle at about 3:00 pm.

> "In a few seconds we distinctly saw the guns fired again, one after the other, sharp. This was done several times – a pause, and then a flash - flash! The sun was shining on the camp at the time and then the camp looked dark, just as if a shadow was passing over it. The guns did not fire after that, and in a few minutes all the tents had disappeared."

Nearly the same moment is described in a Zulu warrior's account:

> "The sun turned black in the middle of the battle; we could still see over us or should have thought we had been fighting till evening. Then we got into the camp, and there was a great deal of smoke and firing. Afterwards the sun came out bright again."

The sudden darkness was later explained by a solar eclipse on that day, the time which was calculated at 2:29 pm. The eclipse coincided with the peak of the battle; in a stunning piece of natural symbolism, on the bloodiest day in the history the Victorian Empire, the sun darkened. As one African folk story has it, in that moment

God closed his eyes, for he could not bear to look upon the horror that man was inflicting upon himself.

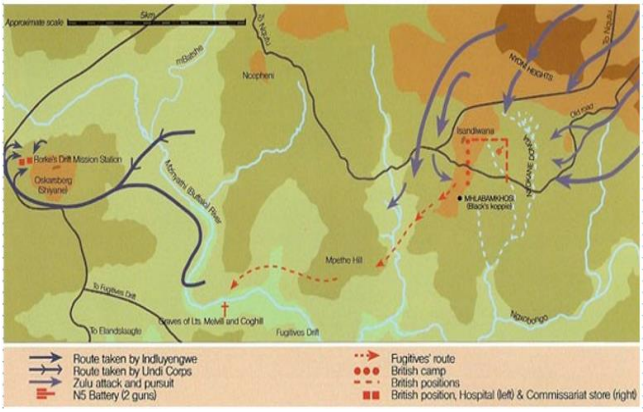
Chelmsford was eventually found by a messenger at 2:30 pm and was finally convinced of the full disaster at 3:30 pm. He immediately decided to retake the camp after a rider reported that the camp was full of victorious Zulus. By 9:00 pm, Chelmsford had concentrated his force and ordered the advance with the 2/24th in the centre flanked by the Volunteers and Mounted Infantry on the wings. By the time they approached Isandlwana it was dark.

The presence of large numbers of bodies grouped together suggested the resistance was more protracted than originally thought, and a number of desperate last stands were made. Evidence showed that many of the bodies, today marked as cairns, were found in several large groups around the camp – including one stand of about 150 men. Pulleine was among them. A Zulu account later described a group of the 24th forming the square on the nek of Isandlwana.

Colonial cavalry, the NMP and the carabiniers, who could easily have fled as they had horses, died around Durnford in his last stand, while nearby their horses were found dead on their picket role. What is clear is that the slaughter was complete in the area around the camp and back towards Natal in what became known as Fugitive's Drift. The fighting had been hand-to-hand combat and no quarter was given to the British regulars. The Zulus had been commanded to ignore the civilians in black coats and this meant that some officers, whose patrol dress was dark blue and black at the time, were spared and escaped.

The British fought back-to-back with bayonet and rifle butts when their ammunition had finally been expended. A Zulu account relates the single-handed fight by the guard of Chelmsford's tent, a big Irishman of the 24th who kept the Zulus back with his bayonet until he was speared and the general's Union flag captured. Both the colours of the 24th were lost, while the Queen's colour of the 1/24th was carried off the field by Lt Melville on horseback but lost when he crossed the river, despite Lt Coghill coming to his aid. Both Melville and Coghill were killed after crossing the river and would receive posthumous Victoria Crosses in 1907 as the legend of their gallantry grew, and, after 27 years steady campaigning by the later Mrs. Melville, on the strength of Queen Victoria being quoted as saying that "if they had survived, they would have been awarded the Victoria Cross." Garnet Wolseley, who would replace Chelmsford, felt otherwise at the time and stated, "I don't like the idea of officers escaping on horseback when their men on foot are being killed."

As mentioned above, a number of fugitives managed to escape. The illustration below shows the general route taken by these personnel in their haste to get back to Natal. Today, the crossing point on the Buffalo River is known as Fugitives Drift. The map also indicates the likely routes by the unengaged, reserve, 4,000 strong impi that attached Rorke's Drift later that day.



Of 67 officers and 1,707 men in the camp, not a single officer of the 24th had survived. Only five imperial officers survived. According to official estimates – probably understated – and the survivors of this carnage left at the foot of Isandlwana or on the long road to the Buffalo River, the bodies of 727 of their white and 471 of their African comrades were found. The captured Natal Native Contingent soldiers were regarded as traitors by the Zulu and executed.

It was a costly victory for the Zulus too. There was no casualty count of the Zulu losses but historians have estimated that perhaps 1,500 to 2,000 were killed in action. Today, the melancholy battlefield is dotted with clusters of cairns of mass graves where groups of British died. There is also an imposing memorial commemorating the valour of the fallen Zulu Impi.

Isandlawana burial site

The Post-Mortem

As in any significant battle involving the losses of thousands of lives, it is important to review the reasons for the outcome. These are presented in the table below.

The Zulus won because:	The British lost because:
• Kept its main force concentrated • Successfully concealed their advance • When discovered, immediately attacked, achieving surprise • Diversionary tactics drew British away from Isandlwana	• Failure of ammunition resupply system • Defending too large a perimeter • Inadequate initial defence preparation around the camp • Chelmsford's underestimation of the Zulu's offensive fighting capabilities • Chelmsford split his force, thus weakening both fighting bodies • Major command failure: Chelmsford failed to respond to earlier messages from the camp

The Aftermath - Impact

Though Isandlwana was a disaster for the British, the Zulu victory did not end the war. The entire invasion would have to be restaged for a number of political reasons but most importantly the jingoistic justification that national honour demanded that the enemy should lose the war. The British Field Army was heavily reinforced and again invaded Zululand. Bartle Frere was recalled and the policy of Confederation was abandoned. The British encouraged the sub-kings to rule their kingdoms without it acknowledging a central Zulu power, ensuring the end of an independent Zulu kingdom.

The measure of respect that the British gained for their opponents as a result of Isandlwana can be seen in that in none of the other engagements of the Zulu war did the British attempt to fight again in their typical linear formation, noted famously as the Thin Red Line, in an open-field battle with the main Zulu impi. In the battles that followed, the British when facing the Zulu, entrenched themselves or formed very close-order formations, such as the square.

The Aftermath – Recriminations

Chelmsford, realising he would have to give account to the government, quickly fixed blame on the dead Durnford, claiming that he disobeyed his orders to fix a proper defensive camp. No evidence exists that such an order was given; there was hardly time for Durnford to entrench the force; and it had been Chelmsford's decision not to entrench. Inevitably, Chelmsford

was relieved of his command by Sir Garnet Wolseley but not before Chelmsford partially retrieved his tattered reputation after routing the Zulu army later that year. He never held another field command.

Following the war and his return to Britain, Chelmsford sought an audience with the new prime minister Gladstone but his request was refused, a very public slight and a clear sign of official disapproval. Chelmsford however, obtained an audience with Queen Victoria to personally explain the events. She asked Gladstone to meet Chelmsford; this meeting was brief, and during it Gladstone voiced his displeasure.

Sources

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- *Twilight of a Warrior Nation, Isandlwana 1879: The Great Zulu Victory, The Anglo-Zulu War,* et al.
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- Google, with numerous references to Isandlwana, Rorkes Drift, Intombi Drift, Hlobane, Gingindlovu, Ulundi.
- Wikipedia.
- Films: *Zulu* (the Rorkes Drift battle) and *Zulu Dawn* (Isandlwana)

LT-COL STEVE HART (Rtd) served in the 101 Wireless/7 Signals Regiment of the Australian Army between 1962 and 1976, including a 2 year attachment to British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) in Germany, 1964-66. He was Commanding Officer of the Regiment's 547 Signal Troop during a 12 month tour of duty in Vietnam, 1969. He also undertook a posting to Washington and left the army in 1980 after 25 years' service.

Women's Wartime Service, Part 1: Military Service

■ Dr J K Haken

The knowledge that women were effectively conducting and could conduct tasks traditionally carried out by men led the services to form women's organizations to free men for active duty. Probably the most widely known women's wartime organisations was the Australian Women's Land Army, and while an agricultural rather than a military body, it made male labour available. The war time organisations were re-established in peace time, but a raft of equal opportunity, gender equality and sex discrimination legislation (1) and sentiment, led the organizations to be merged into previously all male services. The Services now recruiting from both sexes.

Military service by women in Australia dates back to late colonial times when nurses attended the wounded in South Africa. The New South Wales Army Nursing Service Reserve was formed on 13 August 1898 (2). Some 24 nurses and a Lady Superintendent were involved. In the re-organisation of the Colonial Forces after federation, effective 1 July 1902, the New South Wales in the title was replaced by Australian. The service with many other service bodies received Royal Assent in 1948 for service in World War II (3). The Service became a Corps (RAANC) in February 1951.

NSW Army Nursing Service Reserve

The scheme of voluntary aids was founded in England before World War I largely due to the efforts of the Red Cross and the Order of St. John, as a medical help and not a military organization. The scheme was soon adopted by the Australian Red Cross and members worked in military hospitals in Australia during World War I. Some thousands of women were involved in World War I, but all were restricted to nursing or hospital domestic duties.

During World War II, the range of services was vastly expanded, and included almost all tasks previously performed by men. Initially volunteers, payment commenced in January 1940 with overseas service authorised in October 1940. Voluntary Aids were called up in from March 1942 and were effectively part of the Medical Service.

The Australian Army Women's Medical Service (AAWMS) was formed on 18 December 1942 and enrolled those aids which were unpaid. The service continued until February 1951 when it was discontinued and merged with the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps (RAANC). In January 1948 the Voluntary Aid Movement was returned to civilian control and in 1967 the Voluntary Aid Detachments were re-designated Voluntary Aid Service Corps (VASC).

The first of the women's wartime services was that of the Royal Australian Air Force, the Women's Australian Auxiliary Air Force (WAAAF). This was the largest of the wartime women's services. The service was formed in March 1941 after protracted deliberations and disbanded in December 1947.

Women's services were again formed in June 1950 with the Women's Australian Air Force (WAAF) and in November 1950 it became the Women's Royal Australian Air Force (WRAAF). In 1977 the WRAAF was disbanded and absorbed by the RAAF. The Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service (RAAFNS) was formed in July 1940 and after the war was disbanded in November 1946. The service was re-established in 1948 and served in the Korean and Vietnamese conflicts. In 1977, the RAAFNS also ceased to exist as a separate body being integrated into the RAAF.

To free men for combat, many tasks were carried out by women and the Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) was formed on 13 August 1941. Service with a few exceptions was restricted to Australia, a few members served in Borneo and New Guinea. The service was gradually demobilised after World War II and was completed by 30 June 1947, when disbandment occurred. A women's army service was raised in 1951, due largely to troops participating in the Korean conflict. Former AWAS members formed the nucleus of the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC) which was subsequently formed. The Women's Australian Army Corps (WAAC) was formed on 12 February 1951 and was granted the title Royal in April, becoming the Women's Royal Australian Army Corps (WRAAC). The formation was due to a man power shortage and unfruitful recruiting in the male Army. By 1980 WRAAC numbers had fallen and recruiting unsuccessful not assisted by the recent legislation and the Corps was disbanded in early 1985.

WRANS telegraphists of World War II

The other services had women's units as well, such as the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service (WRANS) being formed on 24 July 1942 although telegraphers from the civilian Women's Emergency Signalling Corps (WESC) formed in March 1939 had been employed by the RAN since 28 April 1942 (4). This group was

immediately enlisted on formation of the WRANS. The WRANS were disbanded in 1948 but were re-established on 1 January 1951 (5). With passage of the Sex Discrimination Act, the WRANS, like other women's services, had no future and disbandment occurred in June 1984 with the members being absorbed by the RAN.

WAAAF graduation photo

The Royal Australian Navy Nursing Service (RANNS) was formed in October 1942 and functioned until disbanded in 1948. For enlistment, candidates were required to be registered nurses with at least 12 months ward experience. Nurses held the rank of sub-lieutenant and received preliminary training at the Naval College and at the medical training school at HMAS Cerberus. The service was reformed in November 1948 and in June 1984 the service was merged with the nursing branch of the RAN.

With the exception of the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps (RAANC), the units described are now not in existence. Most were formed and functioned during wartime. Subsequently reformed, the units were superfluous when the services became multi-sexed.

When women were first admitted to the services, many restrictions existed and these have largely disappeared over the years. Currently women hold many senior positions in the Australian Defence Force, the Commanding Officer of the largest naval establishment being a female Captain, with one star rank being first (RAAF) attained in December 1999. No woman has yet headed any of the three services or the Australian Defence Force, but within a few years the situation may change.

End notes

(1) Sex Discrimination Act 1984 Act, No 4 of 1984
(2) Anon New South Wales Government Gazette No 762 6955, 30.8.1898
(3) AAO 99/1948
(4) J.K. Haken, *Naval Historical Review* 39 No 2 32 (June 2018)
(5) K. Christopherson, *Australian Maritime Issues*, 2010, 67

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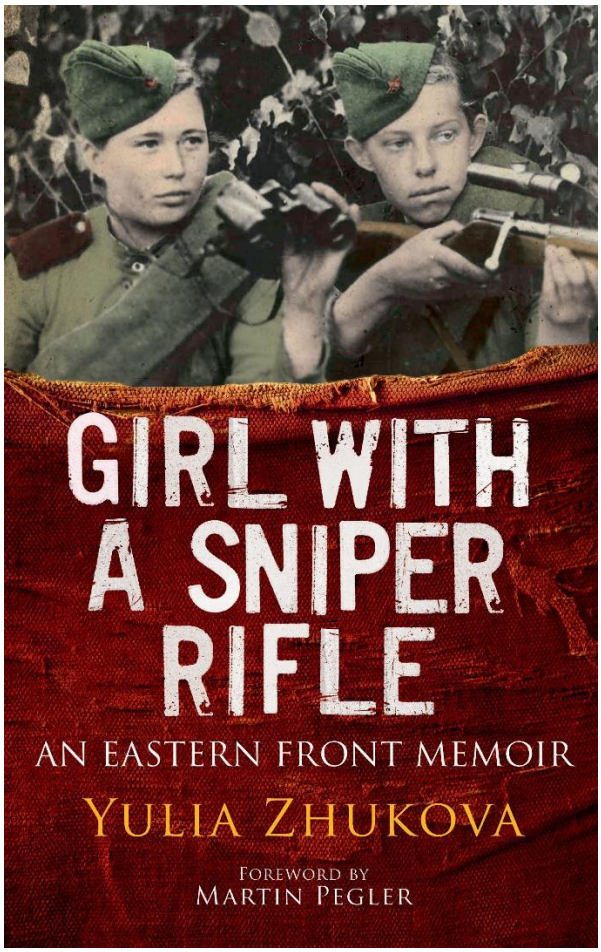
Book Reviews

***Girl With A Sniper Rifle: An Eastern Front Memoir,* Yulia Zhukova, Nov 2020, Newport, NSW: Big Sky Publishing, RRP $29.99.**

■ Review by Joseph Poprzeczny

Probably the most infamous sniper in the English-speaking world is a Frenchman − whose identity remains in dispute − who struck down Admiral Horatio Nelson on October 21st, 1805, during the bloody hurly-burly of the Battle of Trafalgar. According to an 1826 bestselling autobiography it was French Sergeant Robert Guillemard*, (Mémoires de Robert Guillemard, sergent en retraite, de 1805 à 1823),* who had mortally wounded Nelson. But an Alexandre Lardier claimed in an 1830 letter to the editor of *Annales Maritimes et coloniales*, that he was the

author of this popular tome (republished in English and German) and Guillemard was a fictitious character.



Canadian military historian, Robert Gellately, reports in his monumental study: *Lenin, Stalin and Hitler – The Age of Social Catastrophe,* (page 507), that during the Battle of Stalingrad, Russia "used every trick in the book, including heavy use of snipers, *one of whom was credited with 224 kills."* [emphasis added]

Clearly, snipers cannot be overlooked by military historians since they've played pivotal roles in battles, even before telescopic sights were attached to rifles.

Yulia Zhukova, author of *Girl with a Sniper Rifle – An Eastern Front Memoir*, although far from a high-scoring combatant, was, according to onetime Senior Firearms Curator at the Royal Armouries Museum (Leeds), Marin Pegler, "one of hundreds of anonymous women snipers" who had helped repulse Hitler's *Wehrmacht* from Stalin's imperium.

The Soviet Union's best-known snipers, says Pegler, were Ludmila Pavlichenko, with "309 confirmed kills", and poster girl, Rosa Shanina, "59 confirmed kills, including twelve soldiers during the Battle of Vilnius."

Zhukova could only claim eight.

That's a huge 600 kills between just four Soviet snipers, with three of them, and probably four, being women.

Yulia Zhukova hailed from the sizeable town of Uralsk, situated in north-western Kazakhstan, on the Ural River. War, or the impact of war, came to Uralsk, not in September 1939, when Stalin conspired with Hitler to conquer and occupy Poland, but 22-months later, in the summer of 1941, when Hitler invaded the Soviet Union.

That attack, Operation *Barbarossa,* certainly gave rise to a sense of patriotism across Soviet society, a mood that impacted upon Yulia who witnessed Uralsk's population nearly doubling to some 100,000 residents, with some 40,000 arriving from Western USSR to escape Germanic forces.

Equally significantly was the fact that Uralsk became an important military supply or manufacturing centre with probably the most important addition, relocated from Leningrad on the Baltic, being "the No. 231 factory, which was named after Marshall Voroshilov and manufactured naval mines and torpedoes" (p. 8) where she worked as a teenager before volunteering, in 1944, for front line service as a trained sniper.

"When I recall our workshop, I can still visualise to this day the long cigar-shaped bodies of the torpedoes, polished till they gleamed and the huge circular nautical mines. And the people – dead tired from overwork and lack of sleep, emaciated, ever hungry, blue with cold. Over the war period the factory supplied the ships of our navy with around 4,000 mines of various kinds.

Practically every twentieth enemy ship was blown up by a mine manufactured in our factory. And it is no secret that the gigantic German passenger liners, *Wilhelm Gustloff* and *General von Steuben,* both of which had been pressed into service as armed transports, were sunk in 1945 by torpedoes from our factory." (p. 20)

It is not widely known that the loss of life with the sinking of both these German Baltic Sea transports far exceeded the number drowned in the loss of the Titanic in April 1912.

German officials, in early 1945, launched an evacuation far larger than Britain's 1940 Dunkirk troop rescue, ahead of the advancing Red Army, totalling some two million civilians and military personnel. It was during this evacuation that *Wilhelm Gustloff* and *General von Steuben* were torpedoed by Soviet submarine S-13.

The *Wilhelm Gustloff* was sunk on January 20, 1945, with a loss of 9,400 people, and the *General von Steuben* suffered the same fate on February 10, losing around 4,500 refugees and soldiers.

Of the Titanic's estimated 2,224 passengers and crew just over 1,500 perished, so slightly more than one nineth of German losses a third of a century later.

Did Yulia perhaps assist in assembling or shining the torpedoes that put both ships to the bottom of the Baltic Sea? We will, of course, never know, even though asking is certainly not being fanciful.

While the massive German evacuation was underway, departing largely from Gotenhafen (now Gdynia, northern Poland), at the turn of 1944/45, Yulia Zhukova was with the advancing Red Army in what was then still known as East Prussia as well as from across still occupied coastal Poland.

The Red Army had employed snipers during what was called The Winter War of 1939-40, sparked by Stalin, against Finland.

Sniper training commenced straight after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 in the Leningrad area.

"There was no shortage of recruits, as official organizations such as Osoaviakhim (Defence Assistance Union, with numerous shooting ranges and clubs) and Vsevobuch (University Military Training), theoretically at least, had prepared millions of men and women for the role." (p.58)

Early in 1942 Stalin ordered that marksmanship sniping should be organized. This resulted in creation of the Principal School for the Training of Sniper Instructors.

"On December 7, 1942, after much agitation from organisations such as *Komsomol* and many women who had gained marksmanship qualifications, the Central Sniper Instructor School created a separate three-month women's course." (p.58)

Students at Women's Sniper School, 1943

In May the following year, in Veshnyaki, the Principal School for the Training of Female Snipers eventuated, a move that meant only the USSR "employed women specifically in front-line combat."

In June 1943 the female sniper school was relocated to Amerevo, Chelkovskaya district, with 104 sent to the front and 125 retained as instructors.

In January 1944 "585 of 887 second-draft trainees were sent into combat. The third draft (April-November 1944) released 559 more snipers, and the fourth draft, which began in November 1944, allowed 149 instructors and 262 pupils to re-enter service when the draft was aborted early in 1945 owing to the Red Army's ever-increasing ascendancy." (p. 59)

Women snipers headed for the front, 1943

The Central Women's Sniper School thus closed in May 1945, and Zhukova reports that there had been 1,885 graduates "achieving 10,000 – 12,000 kills (claims vary), and more than one hundred of them had been awarded the third-class Order of Glory." (p. 59)

She says that sniper losses were probably in the order of 250 of her dedicated colleagues.

Her autobiography carries a three-page (74-76) description of sniper and ancillary weaponry that's clearly meant for experts with a thorough knowledge of such equipment including its origin and history.

Running throughout her biography is ample evidence that Zhukova hailed from a strongly pro-Bolshevik family. She harbours a complete absence of knowledge of how World War II was launched, in late 1939, by Hitler and Stalin, not just by Hitler.

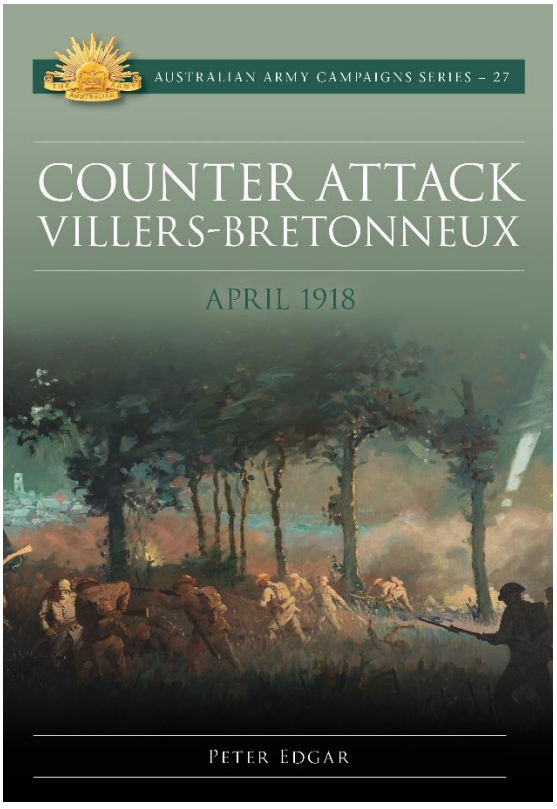
She is utterly oblivious to the fact that Stalin, in late 1939, fell upon Poland, with Hitler, and alone the same year and on into 1940 upon Finland, the three independent Baltic nations of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, as well as Bessarabia and Bukovina, with all the peoples of these lands "offered" incorporation into Stalin's totalitarian imperium.

This failing certainly makes her many objections and condemnations of Hitler's move to conquer and colonise the Western USSR sound embarrassingly hollow.

However, it must be stressed that her frontline experience across East Prussia was far from idyllic which Zhukova, then a young and single woman amongst thousands of fighting men, recounts with admirable and calm candour.

***Counter Attack: Villers-Bretonneux – April 1918*, Peter Edgar, Australian Army Campaign Series No. 27, May 2020, Newport, NSW: Big Sky Publishing, RRP $19.99**

■ Review by John Muscat



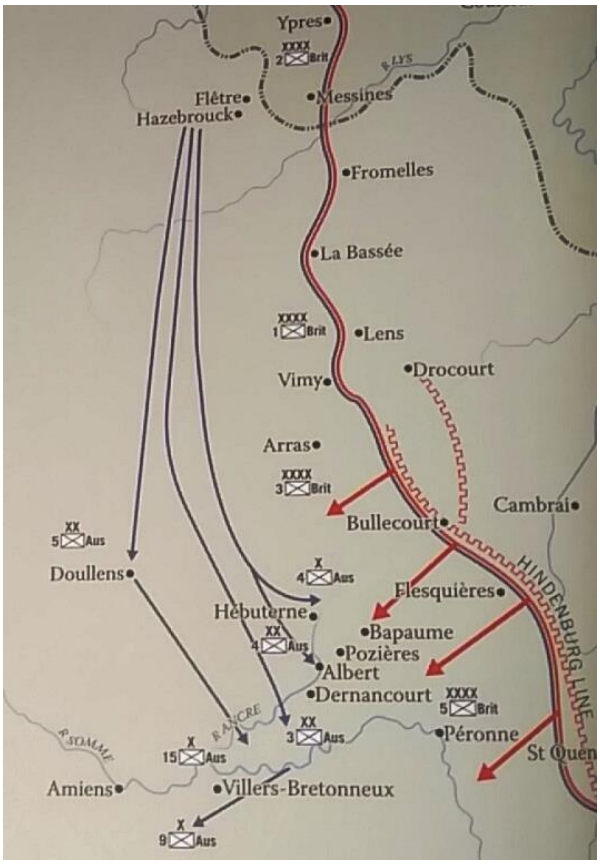
"These valiant men gave their lives to save France, to save the world from the domination of an aggressive superpower. They died to save their new nation

> Australia, a land that abounds in nature's gifts, a nation for a continent and a continent for a nation and now, thanks to them, renowned of all the lands. Themselves they scorned to save. So long as there is an Australia, their name will live for evermore and compatriots will travel to the far-away place of their glory and will visit the high-towered memorial standing staunchly atop the green hill outside the gates of Villers-Bretonneux."

This is the rousing, but fitting, final paragraph of Peter Edgar's account for the *Australian Army Campaigns Series* of the vital defence and recapture of Villers-Bretonneux by Australian forces, along with British and French Moroccan allies, from 4 to 27 April 1918. Focusing on specific battles and campaigns, the series is known for in-depth discussion of aspects like the strategic background, tactical choices, weapons deployed, unit histories and leading personalities in the chain of command. This contribution published in 2020 represents the 27th installment in a project that started in 2005, producing some of the most sought after monographs on engagements by the Australian Army across a range of wars and theatres. Peter Edgar holds a Masters in history from the Australian Defence Force Academy and is the author of two previous books touching on Villers-Bretonneux, sometimes described as the most glorious feat of arms in Australia's history and a turning point of World War I.

From the outset Edgar is determined show that Villers-Bretonneux was a heroic effort in a noble struggle, which can be commemorated without reservation as to the morality or justice of the cause for which many lost their lives. He examines and refutes conventional notions that the First World War was just a senseless blunder, or that cynical and incompetent British superiors led naïve Australians by the nose. Not only France, but Britain and Australia too had good reason to defeat German aggression. Australians were British subjects and almost a quarter of our all-volunteer army were born in the United Kingdom.

Turning to the events of early 1918, Edgar reaffirms that the German Spring Offensive launched on 31 March posed a grave danger to Allied hopes of final victory. For First Quartermaster General Erich Ludendorff, this was an opportunity to exploit his temporary superiority in numbers on the western front, arising from the transfer of divisions following the collapse of Russia and delays in the arrival of American contingents on a large scale. The first phase of the offensive, 'Operation Michael', was an assault on that part of the Allied frontline where the British and French armies conjoined, namely the Amiens sector. Ludendorff aimed to separate them and roll up the British-held front in a north-westerly direction towards to the coast. Taking the major rail hub of Amiens was a crucial objective, the key to which was the overlooking town of Villers-Bretonneux on high-ground across the city's eastern approaches.



At this time the line-up of British forces from north to south consisted of Second Army under General Herbert Plumer in Flanders, General Henry Horne's First Army around Arras, Third

Army commanded by General Julian Byng from Arras to Flesquières, and finally Fifth Army led by General Hubert Gough joining the French east of Pèronne. Fourth Army was out of the line undergoing reconstruction. The five divisions making up the Australian Corps, commanded by General William Birdwood, were placed in Plumer's Second Army. "Within days" of the German attack towards Amiens, however, the Australian Corps was moved south to Fifth Army's III Corps, although Fifth Army was soon disbanded and reformed as Fourth Army under General Henry Rawlinson. Gough was dismissed on 28 March for the disorganized retreat of his units. "Haig was placing his faith in these [Australian and one New Zealand] divisions to be able to stop the enemy at the gates", writes Edgar.

In advance of the other Australian Divisions, Major-General Ewan Sinclair-Maclagan's 4th Division deployed 4th Brigade in the successful defence of Hébuterne from 26 to 31 March, while 12th and 13th Brigades relieved British formations along the west side of the Albert-Amiens railway at Dernancourt. Major-General John Monash's Australian 3rd Division was ordered to re-establish the broken British line from Albert to Bray and on 29 March its 9th Brigade was detached and assigned to British 61st Division of XIX Corps near Villers-Bretonneux. Led by Brigadier-General Charles Rosenthal, "9th Brigade was a potentially strong one", writes Edgar:

> Two of Rosenthal's four battalion commanders were first class: Leslie Morshead of the 33rd Battalion [hero of Tobruk in War War II] … and John Milne of the 36th Battalion would soon play a pivotal role in saving Villers-Bretonneux.

The German move towards Villers-Bretonneux came on 30 March. Morshead's 33rd Battalion advanced beyond the town in the face of a withdrawing British frontline with 34th Battalion out from the reserves in support. They drove the enemy from their picket line and trench, restoring the British line to the south-east of Villers. 9th Brigade's 35th Battalion was subsequently deployed somewhat to the north directly east of Villers, positioned to bear the full brunt of what was coming. The Brigade was now attached to Fourth Army's III Corps, which covered the sector.

Brigadier General Charles Rosenthal

The Germans massed 16 divisions for an attack along the whole III Corps front, which commenced on 4 April after a heavy bombardment. In 35th Battalion's section before the town of Marcelcave, writes Edgar, the Australian "rifle and Lewis-gun fire was so deadly that the enemy retreated in panic". However repeated German attacks on British units to the left began to have their effect and threatened 35th Battalion's flank, forcing it back towards Villers-Bretonneux. This prompted the battalion's commander Lieutenant Colonel Henry Goddard to order companies of 33rd Battalion forward to support the 35th, thus with the assistance of Canadian cavalry the front was stabilised. However further north things were going badly as British 42nd Brigade gave way and the Germans took Hamel, causing dismay among Australian 3rd and 5th Division units in the vicinity, including 15th Brigade north of the

Somme. Brigadier General Harold 'Pompey' Elliott, in command of 15th Brigade, sent his 58th Battalion across the river to reinforce the British, shortly followed by his 59th and 60th Battalions. Before this, 34th and 36th battalions of Rosenthal's 9th Brigade were brought forward and stationed north-west and south-west of Villers-Bretonneux.

Brigadier General Harold 'Pompey' Elliott

In the afternoon the Germans renewed their advance and drove back British divisions on the southern flank of the Australian 35th Battalion, which attempted to form a defensive flank but had to retire. The consequences rippled northwards resulting in 33rd Battalion retiring as well. As the Germans streamed towards Villers, Goddard worked to improvise a defensive line. He turned to Lieutenant Colonel John Milne, commander of 36th Battalion, and said: "Colonel, you must counter-attack at once". Milne sent in A and B companies "forward at a fast trot". According to Edgar, "[36th Battalion's] A Company on the left continued to move with splendid dash … and many Germans, outflanked, began to fall back …" Eventually darkness brought 36th Battalion's progress to a halt, but a rough line of resistance has been formed. Up north 35th, 34th and 33rd Battalions also managed to stop the Germans and fill gaps in the line. "The enemy advance on Villers-Bretonneux had been foiled", says Edgar. On the following day, Elliott's 15th Brigade, yet further up, blocked an attempted German advance. Edgar assigns most of the credit to Milne, "the man on the spot who seizes the moment and wrenches victory from defeat".

Brigadier General Thomas William Glasgow

The Germans were not about to call it quits, however. On 5 April they delivered a blow against Dernancourt, where Australian 4th Division were stationed. Major General John Gellibrand's 12th Brigade and Major General William Glasgow's 13th Brigade had positioned themselves along a railway embankment north-west of the town. Glasgow's 52nd Battalion held the railway while his 51st, 50th and 49th were entrenched in the rear. Gellibrand's 47th, adjoining Glasgow's 52th, and 48th battalions lined the railway further north, with the 45th and 46th behind. Initially the Germans struck the 47th and drove them westward. While the 52nd's machine-gunners offered stiff resistance, they too had to go and soon most of 12th Brigade abandoned the railway line. But late in the afternoon the 49th and 45th counter-attacked in the face of "an unprecedented storm of small arms and machine-gun fire". Writes Edgar: "the centre companies were decimated, but both

flanking companies made progress and the Germans fled, providing clear targets for the Australian machine-gunners". While not all of the lost ground had been regained, this "was another important Australian victory and a setback for the enemy".

Lt Col John Milne

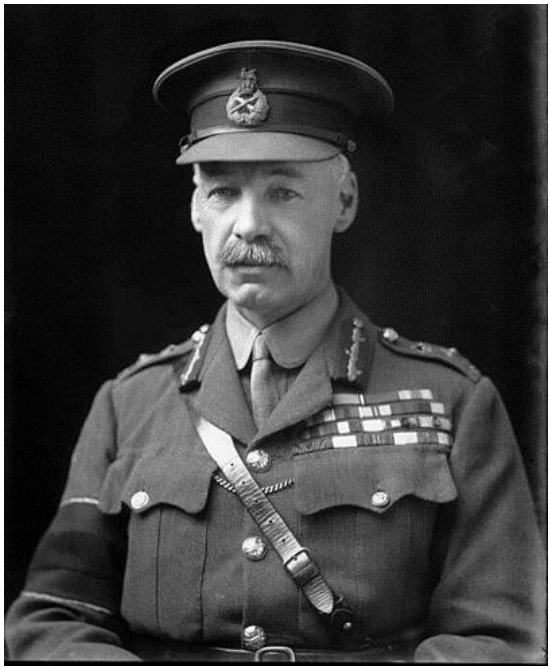
Rawlinson was acutely conscious of the importance of Villers-Bretonneux and disposed his forces accordingly. He wanted the experienced Australians in support of forward British divisions recently reinforced with young, raw troops. Elliott's 15th Brigade and Glasgow's 13th Brigade were deployed to defensive lines or reserve positions to be available for counter-attack in the event of a renewed enemy assault. Such an assault duly came on the morning of 24 April. The shock and awe of an intense bombardment facilitated a German breakthrough as British positions south-east of Villers-Bretonneux gave way. With tanks in the lead and the infantry engaged in hand-to-hand fighting, the Germans captured the town but were stopped along its western edges. An attempt to pivot right and take nearby Hill 104 was halted by Australian 14th Brigade and British 25th Brigade. But the German gains alarmed British Commander-In-Chief Sir Douglas Haig and French Generalissimo Ferdinand Foch, who charged Rawlinson with launching a counter-attack to recapture Villers as soon as possible.

Rawlinson's staff came up with a plan for envelopment and ordered Glasgow's 13th Brigade to move south of the town and report to Lieutenant General Sir William Heneker's British III Corps near Villers. Elliott, whose 15th Brigade remained part of Hobbs' 5th Australian Division, had already stationed his battalions to its north. Following instructions from their senior commanders, Glasgow and Elliott met at 8:00pm on 24 April and worked out details of their pincer movement. Elliott's brigade would envelope Villers from the north while Glasgow's men would do so from the south, with the intention of converging to the east. Glasgow persuaded Heneker that his attack should proceed from a more frontal position and at night.

At the designated time of 10:00pm, 13th Brigade's 51st and 52nd Battalions followed by the 50th, with British support on the far-right flank, moved off toward Monument Wood on the horizon and "all hell broke loose". German machine-guns enfiladed the line, but owing to heroic efforts from 51st Battalion's 9th and 10th platoons, the most dangerous enemy posts were destroyed. The men faced another formidable obstacle when they reached the "Cachy switch line", where German machine-gun posts sheltered in a hollow formed by two sunken roads. They were overcome with aggressive and spirited fire-and-movement tactics on the part of 51st and 52nd battalions, but casualties were heavy and some companies were decimated. Troops of the 52nd were the first to reach the objective of Monument Wood, followed up by the 50th. Then followed the hard work of consolidating the new continuous front line south-east of Villers.

Elliott's 60th and 57th Battalions also took their places in line at 10:00 pm but the 59th was delayed for over an hour, which had consequences for the planned convergence with

Glasgow's men. Nevertheless, the superbly trained brigade reached its initial objectives swiftly and silently. On detection by the Germans, they charged and "shot, bludgeoned and bayoneted their way forward, driving the enemy (the lucky ones) back." By 2:30 pm on 25 April, 15th Brigade's line was established to Elliott's satisfaction extending east of the town allowing British units to follow and 'mop up' the German defenders.



General Sir Henry Rawlinson

However, while 13th Brigade had reached Monument Wood during the night attack, they could not find 15th Brigade and had to fall back to a more secure line, leaving a 1,400 metre gap in the planned ring around Villers-Bretonneux. A British battalion went in to clear the gap and Glasgow in turn sent through his 50th Battalion, which succeeded in linking up with Elliott's 57th. "The line to the east of the town was now complete". At this stage the far-right flank of 13th Brigade battalions was still under heavy fire from the south and the Germans attempted an advance from that direction. This was stymied by a courageous though costly attack by the French Moroccan Division.

"The recapture overnight of Villers-Bretonneux was at once recognized as a feat of arms", writes Edgar, "praise flooded in from all quarters". Haig singled out the 13th and 15th Australian Brigades for special mention. Brigadier General George Grogan, commander of the British 23rd Brigade, called it "perhaps the greatest individual feat of the war". Edgar is at pains to point out that the British, Canadians and French Moroccans fought courageously and effectively at Villers-Bretonneux. The Australian achievements would not have been possible without them. But there is no doubt that credit for the victory belongs above all to the Australians, including the 1,200 who gave their lives.

Edgar succeeds in conveying all of these permutations in military units and formations as well as their complex movements with clear and succinct language. The twelve well marked and illustrated maps, at various scales, which appear throughout the book add immensely to the reader's comprehension of the action. The same can be said for the many images of soldiers, officers, whole units, weapons and places under discussion, at least one of which appears on virtually every page. Some of these are artists' impressions of dramatic events on the battlefield, like Will Longstaff's *Villers-Bretonneux* depicting 13th Brigade's advance on 25 April 1918.

Will Longstaff's *Villers-Bretonneux*

There are also several helpful break-outs beside the main narrative with information about the weapons used, including the German Mauser *Gewehr* 98/05 rifle, British Short Magazine Lee-Enfield, British Pattern 1907 (P.07) bayonet,

Vickers Mk I Machine-Gun, *Maschinengewehr* 08 Medium Machine-Gun, Maxim 08/15 Light Machine-Gun, Lewis Mk I Light Machine-Gun, Three-Inch Stokes Trench Mortar Mk I, *Minenwerfer*, Webley Mk IV Service Revolver, Luger P08 Parabellum Pistol, British Mark IV Tank, British Whippet Tank, British 18-Pounder Mark II Field Gun, German 77-MM *Feldkanone* 96, German A7V Tank (*Sturmpanzerwagen*), Mills Hand and Rifle Grenades, and *Stielhandgranate* (Stick Grenade). Many of these weapons were not available earlier in the war and made the fighting substantially more mobile than it had been prior to late 1917.

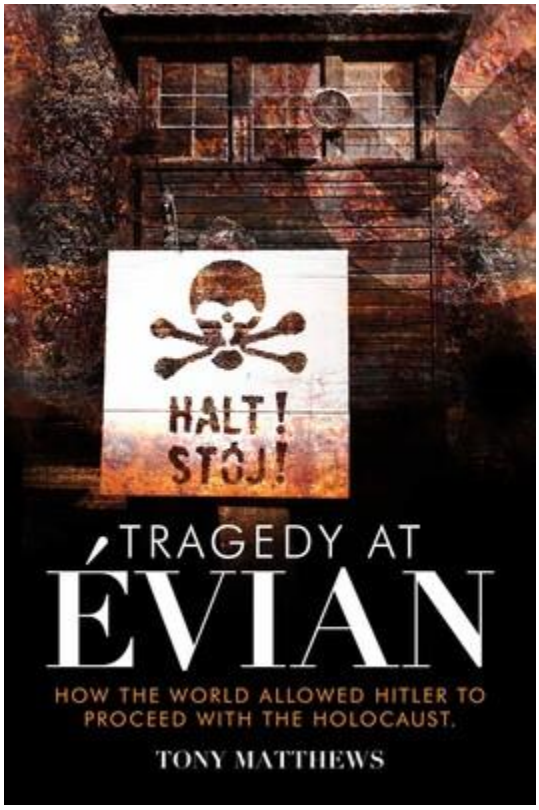
Edgar even resorts to a break-out to clear up what he seems to regard as a serious misapprehension about Villers-Bretonneux. This is the myth that John Monash was the architect of victory. As he explains, Monash's involvement was peripheral at best, and he had no important role in the chain of command. "It was T.W. (William) Glasgow, whose brigade made the attack south of the town, whose name ought to be indelibly affixed to the Villers-Bretonneux triumph."

***Tragedy at Évian: How the World Allowed Hitler to Proceed with the Holocaust*, Tony Matthews, Sep 2020, Big Sky Publishing, Newport. RRP $34.99.**

■ Review by David Martin

A native of Queensland, Tony Matthews has worked in the television industry for many years and been responsible for the production of numerous historical documentaries for the Seven Network and the ABC. He has also written more than thirty books about Australian history, especially about aspects of the world wars.

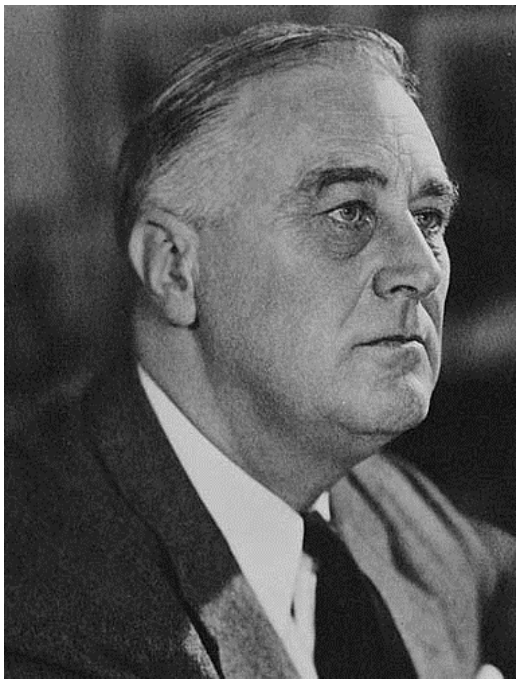
Tony's interest in the fate of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis can be traced back to conversations with his father, Emrys. He was a British soldier who fought in Europe, and on 15 April 1945 was involved in the liberation of the inmates of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp – this year marks the 75th anniversary. Thus began Tony's life-long interest in the subject of the Holocaust. And this has been combined with a broader, on-going concern for the fate of refugees from war-torn regions of the modern world – most recently Syria and Iraq. For some time he has been thinking about the fate of such peoples, and what could be done to help them. That is how this book originated; it is the product of about thirty years of research.



Tragedy at Évian has a quite different perspective from other histories of the topic, a result of the historical sources Matthews relies upon. They consist largely of top secret documents from the US State Department, supplemented by information from the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. It is from this perspective that the topic is viewed.

The first half of Matthews's book focuses on an initiative of US President Franklin D Roosevelt to help the 570,000 Jews who were subjected to increasingly harsh treatment in the wake of the rise of Hitler's Nazi Party, (and Germany's subsequent *Anschluss* with Austria). For reasons that remain largely unexplained by Matthews, Roosevelt arranged for a conference to be convened at Évian-les-Bains in France, a holiday

resort on the shores of Lake Geneva. Between 6 and 15 July 1938, 32 nations met there to discuss the possibility of accepting Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria. The narrative consists mainly of an investigation of why, in turn, practically all of the nations represented could not make themselves available for the settlement of Jewish refugees. As a result of the Depression, they were suffering much unemployment with little room for refugees, and this was a major consideration. If there was any room for immigrants, it was often for unskilled agricultural workers, and there were very few Jews who fitted that profile – most being from urban areas. But the insurmountable problem was anti-Semitism: there was an almost universal hostility to the resettlement of Jews. (About the only region available to accept Jewish refugees was Palestine.) The Évian conference achieved practically nothing.



Franklin Delano Roosevelt

Matthews's central argument is: 'There is no doubt that the Évian conference was a critical turning point in world history. The outcome of the conference set the stage for the attempted complete annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe. No other international conference in modern history has played such a profoundly significant role in world events and affected the fates of so many individuals'. Thus, so the argument goes, the Holocaust could have been averted if only the participating nations had been motivated by humanitarian concerns, and been prepared to accept the victims of increasing Nazi attacks. But they weren't so motivated. 'In Berlin Hitler viewed the resolution of the Évian conference with considerable contempt. He had been hoping that the "Nations of Asylum" would take the Jewish problem off his agenda. Now, however, he believed that he was left with little alternative. Jews were not welcome anywhere in the world, and so there was only one solution'.

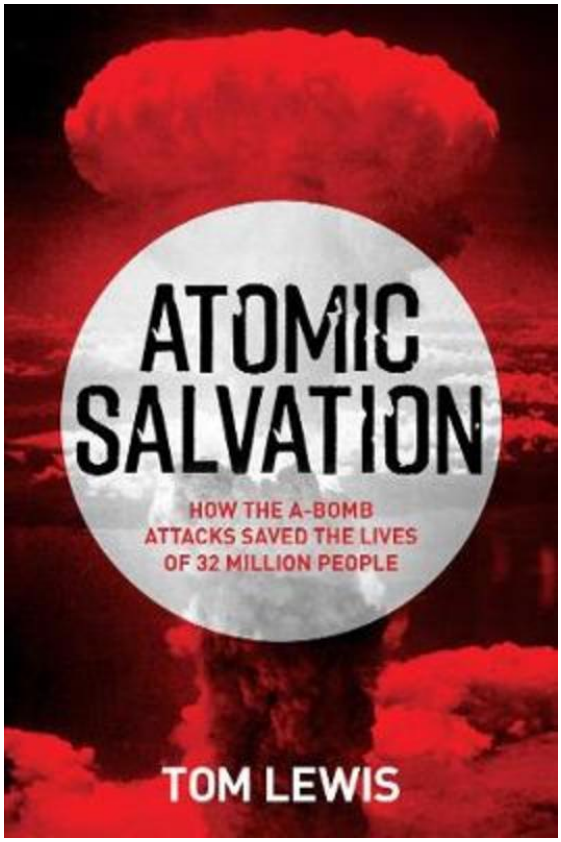
A problem with Matthews's argument is that it is based on the proposition that it was always in Hitler's mind to exterminate the Jews under his control – which subsequently extended to include the Jews who were living in the areas conquered by Nazi Germany. From a very early stage in his political career, Hitler had been prone to use the term 'exterminate' in the same breath when referring to the Jews. But the reality was that when he came to power, his intention was to force the Jews to flee. His regime would even seriously consider transporting Jews by ship, through the Mediterranean, to the island of Madagascar. It was only when such schemes could not be implemented that, from about the time of the Wannsee Conference of 20 January 1942, plans for what we now would recognise as the Holocaust began to materialise – in a haphazard way. The Holocaust had not been on the Nazi agenda in July 1938, at the time of the Évian conference.

The second half of the book provides a catalogue of people and organizations who behaved heroically to help Jews escape the Nazis under the most dangerous of circumstances.

***Atomic Salvation: How the A-Bomb Attacks Saved the Lives of 32 Million People*, Tom Lewis, July 2020, Big Sky Publishing, Newport. RRP $29.99.**

■ Review by Mark Moore

I approached this book with some trepidation. I have qualms about the use of statistics. They can be manipulated to support almost any opinion if they and their sources are not clearly defined. I also had little knowledge of the use of the atomic bomb in 1945, the rationale for its use or any other factors. So before writing this review I did some additional reading to, hopefully, do this book and the reader justice.



The preface sets out Lewis's thesis, and explains:

> The crux of *Atomic Salvation* is that the deaths of 200,000 Japanese in the A-Bomb attacks prevented the deaths of more than a million troops, around 3.5 million dead in territories the Empire held, and around 28 million Japanese. Millions more on both sides would have been wounded. (p. 4)

Atomic Salvation investigates the military situation as it stood at the time the A-Bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In doing so, according to the publishers, Lewis examined documents from both Allied and Japanese sources. However, looking at the extensive endnotes, the sources are found to be substantially secondary works, and those primary sources cited do not elucidate the decision-making processes of the Americans or discussions held by the Japanese leadership preceding or following the bombings.

Lewis' estimation of the casualties from not dropping the bomb do provide a persuasive argument for the bombings which brought about Japan's surrender. Lewis examines the numbers of Americans who would have been involved in the invasion of Japan, composed of ground, navy, and air forces, as well as potential Japanese casualties of the Allied invasion, including its mobilized citizenry. These included girls and boys aged over 14 and 12 respectively, who were taught to use wooden spears as weapons and were expected to give their lives to defend Japan. Also discussed by Lewis are the expected casualties among the 'civilian' Japanese, those who would not be involved in resistance to the invasion but who could be perceived as potential combatants, based on prior experience following the invasions of Okinawa and Saipan and the resultant bloodbaths.

However, he downplays the influence of Soviet Russia's invasion of Manchuria, arguing it is "often expanded beyond logic" (p.191). Lewis does suggest that the casualty rate due to Russia's invasion would have been high, but intimates that this would have had a similar effect on Stalin as a high casualty count had on Truman. This despite the apparent lack of concern Stalin showed for Russia's high casualty numbers on the European Eastern front. Lewis's argument against the impact of Russia on Japan is based on the former's inability, due to lack of necessary materiel and experience, to participate in the invasion of Japan.

Russia's declaration of war against Japan established the potential for occupation of parts of the Japanese homeland by Soviet forces in collaboration with other Allied countries. Stalin was hoping to occupy Hokkaido, which would

have worried a Japanese leadership hearing reports about the effect of Soviet occupation on Eastern Europe. Lewis does no see this as a factor in the Japanese surrender.

Lewis totally ignores the political arguments underpinning in the decision-making processes of both the Allies and the Japanese. Documents exist from both sides. Not so many in the case of the Japanese due to the destruction of archives after the surrender, but some are available via the US National Securities Archives (1). The diaries of some surviving Japanese Cabinet members are also available.

Hiroshima after the bomb

Atomic Salvation examines the initial reception of the bombings by both the Americans and the other Allied powers. They were met with horror but acceptance, in that they had saved millions of lives, both American and Japanese, despite the deaths of 200,000 Japanese at the time. According to Lewis, the writings of revisionist historians changed this to a view that the bombings should never have occurred,as the Japanese would have surrendered anyway. Lewis's discussion of this misses an opportunity by not addressing the discredited *United States Bombing Survey,* which was the initial source of this suggestion. Instead, Lewis refutes the theory that the bombings occurring due to racism, and then discusses the portrayal of the bombings in a selection of children's literature.

Lewis describes his book as "a book of military analysis" (p.310), which it surely is. But it loses in failing to analyse or discuss the political decisions leading to the bombings or the Japanese surrender. Chapter 18 starts along these lines but fizzles. To discuss and analyse a military campaign, it is also necessary to discuss and analyse the political context. Politics start and end a war and shape the reasons for campaigns and battles, as they did the use of atomic bombs against Japan in 1945.

Lewis has been done some disservice in the editing. Sections of text are repeated on occasion and the veracity of attribution called into doubt when Major Charles Sweeney is described as "the *Enola Gay* pilot" (p. 296).

If one is interested in the statistics of deaths and injuries this book may well be of interest in combination with more rounded discussions of the reasons for the use of the atomic bombs.
