# INTRODUCTION TO THE THIRD EDITION

In the nearly ten years since the last edition of this book was prepared, the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has faced a range of challenges and a greatly heightened tempo of operational deployments. Australian strategic policy has also been transformed under the conservative government of John Howard, partly in response to a radically altered strategic climate spawned by the terrorist attacks of September 11, but reflecting as well important shifts in the security dynamics of our region, some of which pre-date those attacks. The American alliance, for long one of the central elements of Australian security policy after 1945, has now become the keystone of Australia's security architecture. These developments have brought benefits to both the ADF and the nation, while raising some longer-term issues the implications of which have not been fully thought through, at least at the political level.

The 'war against terror', or the 'Long War' as it is coming to be called, presents a range of issues and challenges for Western interests in the struggle against Islamist extremism and the international terrorist movements it has spawned. Australian involvement thus far has been limited and largely confined to niche capabilities, and casualties have been extremely light. It is impossible to know how this conflict, in any of its current phases, will end, but it is both possible and important to see Australian involvement in a wider context. At the time of writing, the ADF has approximately 3500 personnel on deployment world-wide, nearly 2000 of these in Iraq and Afghanistan. The scale is smaller than either INTERFET or Vietnam at their height, but the long-term and sustained nature of the commitment is straining the defence organisation. The reasons for this lie in our recent defence history, in particular the pursuit of the wrong-headed doctrine of 'Defence of Australia' (DoA) that emerged in the late 1980s and that degraded the army and our overall ability to project and sustain forces at a distance beyond our shores

in defence of national interests. For this reason, my discussion of the recent past in the book's final chapter suggests the continuity between the aftermath of Vietnam and the adoption of DoA, the pushback against this policy in the second half of the 1990s that made successful intervention in East Timor possible, and the necessary rebuilding of ADF capabilities in the first decade of the 21st century made imperative by involvement in the Long War.

The army is now larger in terms of overall numbers, and greatly enhanced through the 'hardening and networking' program and the expansion of Special Forces capabilities. The RAN is set to acquire new amphibious ships to support the land forces, and new air warfare destroyers to provide the protection these may require in hostile environments. Carping from the left fringe of politics notwithstanding, there appears to be broad general public support for these initiatives, and for the deployment of Australian forces in Afghanistan to help rebuild that country and to eliminate the Taliban and residual Al'Qaida forces still contesting the authority of the central government in Kabul. But at the same time, popular support for the war in Iraq, never robust, has eroded substantially since the failure of US-led efforts at stabilisation and reconstruction has become acutely obvious. Perceived failure in Iraq does not explain (though it may contribute towards) the difficulties the ADF experiences in attracting sufficient members to its ranks, and keeping them once there. In this regard the effects of a post-modern 'Revolution in Attitudes to the Military', identified by British military historian Jeremy Black, are doubtless making themselves felt in Australia as in other advanced Western liberal democracies such as Canada and Britain.

All of this is consistent with the longer sweep of our military history, and astute observers will readily draw comparisons between the 1990s, for example, and the 1930s. History does not repeat itself (though historians may, indeed, repeat each other), but as the American poet Walt Whitman, a veteran of the American Civil War, once observed, 'sometimes it rhymes'. Understanding the events of recent years in that wider context should serve to remind us yet again of the essentially dynamic nature of history and of the unending dialogue between the past and the present.

# INTRODUCTION TO THE
# SECOND EDITION

Australians do not generally think of themselves as a military people. Our heroes play at full-forward or scrum-half or open the batting, and when we do acknowledge the heroic qualities of someone in a military uniform it is more likely to be for self-sacrificial mateship than deeds of martial virtue. We have statues in the national capital to Simpson and the donkey and to 'Weary' Dunlop, both of them symbols of suffering and its alleviation, but none to Albert Jacka, the first Australian to win the Victoria Cross at Gallipoli for single-handedly holding a trench against a Turkish raiding party. Yet in his day Jacka was as great a public figure as Dunlop became in more recent times, and his funeral in Melbourne was attended by thousands, as Dunlop's was. But there, it seems, the similarities end.

Sporting teams and primary produce have not been our only notable exports. In the twentieth century we have been known equally for the quality of our soldiers and our willingness to send them overseas to fight alongside our allies in a variety of causes. At home, we have frequently differed over the necessity to do so, and if the voices raised in dissent have often been in the minority (sometimes distinctly so), in most periods such dissension has been tolerated (though sometimes barely so). If we have been prepared to make considerable sacrifices in time of war, we have been equally ready to ignore defence issues in time of peace, with most of the usual lamentable consequences.

War and military service have been among the great defining influences in our history. It is increasingly a commonplace to observe that our genuine national day is 25 April, Anzac Day, rather than 26 January, which marks merely the first settlement of New South Wales. A majority of Australians still define an important part of the national ethos and national

identity in terms of the Australian experience of war, and even those who criticise the martial dimensions of the national heritage, such as some feminist critics, often accept the argument on its own terms. Nor is Anzac Day and the Digger cult confined to the pre-baby boomer generation, or to members of the Anglo–Celtic tribes. Attendances at Anzac Day commemorations around Australia attest to the continuing vitality of the Anzac tradition, and of its capacity for reinvention with each new generation, a point further underscored during the 'Australia Remembers' commemorations of significant anniversaries from the Second World War held between 1992–95. Likewise, the interment of the Unknown Australian Soldier at the Australian War Memorial in November 1993 prompted enormous crowds of purposeful watchers for whom the event resonated in ways which surprised even those who had argued long and hard for the repatriation of this last symbolic Digger. The rear of the Sydney Anzac Day march is becoming longer each year, as the veteran population within the various post-1945 communities of migration asserts its right to a share in the imagery of Anzac, a clear signal that participation and legitimation are linked.

All of this is readily recognisable, and has been the source of comment and analysis for some decades concerning the manner and outcome of the development of white Australia. But at the heart of white settlement in Australia, as elsewhere, lies the violent dispossession of the previous tenants, an aspect of our history with which many Australians have still to come to terms. The conflict between whites and blacks on the frontier of settlement was neither unique, nor uniquely horrible, but the failure to acknowledge its existence and the baleful consequences for Aboriginal people which flow from it is not only a profound discredit to us as a community, but suggests something of the insecurity which has run through sections of the white population since the mid-19th century: as we took this country, might not it yet be taken from us?

The United States was created in one war – a war for independence – and was confirmed and renewed in a still greater one, the Civil War. Australians acquired their independence peacefully and in stages, by dint of legislation, and our disagreements have never been so great that we have felt the need to kill each other over an opinion. But war has defined us just as clearly, and if we want to understand ourselves as a community then we must understand the place of war and the military in our past and our present.

War has shaped some of our most bitter domestic political debates, especially over conscription during the Great War and for Vietnam. It has helped to transform us as a society, from something narrowly British and provincial by opening Australia up to American influence and to the great waves

of non-British migration after 1945, both of which are consequences of the Second World War. For most of the 20th century, military service has been the single greatest shared experience of white Australian males, whether as volunteers abroad for the duration, as trainees either voluntarily or compulsorily enlisted in the citizen forces at home, or as a regular or a national serviceman in the postwar conflicts in our region. That common denominator of experience is now changing, but the influence of a major war is generally held to continue to shape a society for a century after its end and the cultural, if not the physical, impact of past military endeavours is likely to continue in Australia well beyond 2001.

There is a certain irony in this. In most post-industrial societies in the West, war is seen more often as an aberration, an unfortunate and undesirable resort of final choice in regulating relations between states. This holds true to some extent in Australia, too. Public support for the decision to join the United Nations coalition forces in the Gulf War of 1990–91 was widespread, but it was noticeably less solid when the Australian government chose to send a small and largely token contribution to the Gulf again at the beginning of 1998, when the need for an armed response to Iraqi actions was ostensibly less clear. There would be near-unanimous support for the proposition that peacekeeping, especially under United Nations auspices, is an appropriate use of the Australian Defence Force, but little understanding that too great an emphasis on peacekeeping corrupts armed forces and unfits them both for their primary purpose and as peacekeepers, as the Canadians have found to their shock in recent years.

This is a book about the place of war and the military in our history. It pays due regard to what is known as the 'war and society' school of historical issues, and readers will find in its pages consistent, if scattered, reference to the role of women, the impact of veterans, the outcomes for indigenous peoples, the parts played by industry and the consequences of war for economic activity. There is considerable discussion of the policy context without which the role and functions of the military will make little sense. But at its heart lies the idea of war as a human activity, and the military as human institutions studied in their Australian manifestations.

In the first edition of this book I noted that there were numerous silences in the literature of Australians and war, and voiced the hope that before long other scholars would help to fill the gaps. In preparing this edition, and especially while revising the bibliographic chapter, I have been struck by the ways in which scholarship in the field has moved forward dramatically in some areas, but hardly at all in others. In part this reflects the movement in the '30-year rule' which governs access to official records, in part the

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continuing interest in Australian history as grist for the PhD mill in the universities. But there is still so much we do not know, and so much still to be said, that perhaps the things which this book does not deal with, or deals with inadequately, will prompt renewed and continuing activity across the board. In which case, a further edition may well be called for.

# 1

## The British Period, 1788–1870

Early colonial society bore the stamp of the British military to a marked degree. Indeed, the first colony of New South Wales owed its foundation in large part to strategic considerations. With the opening of the colonies to free settlement from around the 1820s, the military stamp of early Australian life diminished, but the British naval and military presence continued to be an important one until the final removal of the garrison in 1870. Although the military duties of the British regiments were always low-scale, the military played an important role in virtually all areas of colonial life.

The argument that Australia was founded as a dumping ground for the scum of the Georgian prison system has long been recognised as too simple an explanation. With increasing sophistication, historians have come to recognise the importance of international trade rivalries in 18th-century British policy, and the emerging importance of global sea power. The decision to colonise New South Wales cannot be isolated from the strategic imperatives of the world's first truly global struggle, the Seven Years' War (1757–63). This is not to suggest that the 'convict dumping' explanation has been overturned entirely, but to it have been added what might be characterised as 'trade' and 'navalist' interpretations of Australia's origins. Certainly, the British government welcomed the chance to establish an entrepôt for the furtherance of the East Indies and China trade, and the Admiralty sought to exploit the abundant stocks of timber and flax in New Zealand and on Norfolk Island to furnish naval stores to vessels of the Royal Navy in the East. An even more immediate imperative, however, following the failure of plans for various African alternatives, was the need for a naval base in wartime from which the British might interdict the maritime communications of the French, Dutch and Spanish.

There was a pleasing harmony between these considerations and the need to find a new destination for convicts previously shipped off to the American colonies. Convicts were an acceptable form of expendable labour with which to establish a naval base, and to the negative value of reducing social tension in early industrial Britain was added the prospect of strengthening Britain's hand in the trading and imperial rivalries which existed between Britain and the continental powers, especially France. As Lord Sydney told the directors of the East India Company, such a settlement would prevent 'the emigration of Our European Neighbours to that Quarter'. Given what we know of Anglo-French imperial rivalry in India, North America and elsewhere in the course of the 18th century, it seems reasonable to assume that the Australian colonies owed their foundation in large measure to the strategic perspectives in Whitehall. In this sense, then, the history of white settlement in Australia has an important military dimension from its very beginning.

That military dimension was reinforced by the nature of settlement itself. The garrison troops that arrived with Captain Arthur Phillip in January 1788 comprised three companies of the Marines, 212 all ranks, commanded by Major Robert Ross. The leading officials of the infant colony were all officers of the garrison, and the governor himself exercised supreme military and civil authority. As the senior commanding officer, Ross was appointed Lieutenant-Governor, a combination of posts which continued for the first half-century of the colony. Of thirty-four governors, lieutenant-governors and administrators of New South Wales, Tasmania and Victoria between 1788 and 1855, only three were civilians, and more than one-third of all such posts in the first century of white settlement were filled by serving military officers.

The term of foreign service for the First Fleet marines was fixed at three years, but it was four years before the first contingent was relieved in 1791, and that after enduring considerable privation through inadequate rations, poor quarters, and the hard physical labour attending the establishment of the settlement. They were replaced by the New South Wales Corps. Specially raised in 1789 for service as a colonial garrison force, this unit has had a particularly bad press in Australian history, but in fact the overall quality of the regiment was not demonstrably worse than that pertaining elsewhere in the British army of the day. The officers, experienced men drawn from other regiments, raised their own companies, receiving three guineas for each approved recruit, and a proportion of the rank and file were drawn from the Savoy military prison or were convicts of good character recruited locally in the colony. Governor Bligh, not the most objective witness in the circumstances, remarked on the large number of 'soldiers from the Savoy

Table 1.1 *Composition of the New South Wales Corps, 1790–1810*

| Year | Total corps strength | No. of convicts | No. of ex-Savoy | Commissioned officers in NSW |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1790 | – | – | – | 10 |
| 1791 | 192 | 5 | – | 14 |
| 1792 | 358 | 5 | 4 | 21 |
| 1793 | 436 | 30 | 9 | 21 |
| 1794 | 496 | 41 | 21 | 22 |
| 1795 | 516 | 58 | 25 | 21 |
| 1796 | 522 | 54 | 24 | 21 |
| 1797 | 535 | 59 | 25 | 20 |
| 1798 | 564 | 72 | 38 | 20 |
| 1799 | 564 | 76 | 40[a] | 23 |
| 1800 | 577 | 76 | 38 | 23 |
| 1801 | 635 | 93 | 35 | 25 |
| 1802 | 685 | 96[b] | 34 | 24 |
| 1803 | 682 | 86 | 32 | 25 |
| 1804 | 563 | 71 | 26 | 25 |
| 1805 | 579 | 70 | 26 | 26 |
| 1806 | 587 | 69 | 26 | 24 |
| 1807 | 596 | 65 | 25 | 22 |
| 1808 | 601 | 63 | 21 | 26 |
| 1809 | 802 | 62 | 21 | 33 |
| 1810 | 794 | 57 | 21 | 34[c] |

[a] Maximum representation, 7.09 per cent.
[b] Maximum representation, 14.01 per cent.
[c] A total of 82 active in the Corps during the period.
*Source:* Pamela Statham, *Ins and Outs: The Composition and Disposal of the NSW Corps 1790–1810*, Canberra, 1988

and other characters who have been considered as disgraceful to every other regiment', but in 1807 there were only twenty-five ex-Savoy recruits in the ranks, and such men never reached 10 per cent of the Corps' strength (see Table 1.1). By way of comparison, in 1787 regiments detailed for Indian service were reinforced with prisoners from Gloucester gaol, and the 60th Regiment in the West Indies was often brought up to strength with Irish deserters from other regiments. Throughout the British army, the abuse of patronage by officers was commonplace prior to the gradual reforms initiated by Generals Sir Ralph Abercrombie and Sir John Moore and the appointment

of Frederick, Duke of York as Commander-in-Chief in 1795. The involvement of officers in business, which so scandalises later critics of the 'Rum Corps', remained accepted practice among officers in India into the nineteenth century. On the other hand, many of these same officers were skilled artists, farmers, botanists, surveyors and engineers, and keepers of detailed journals and diaries. Such men laid much of the civilian infrastructure of the early colony, as well as discharging their military functions and profiting from their land and business interests.

The conditions endured by the other ranks were frequently appalling. Enlistment was for twenty-one years, twenty-four in the cavalry. With low life expectancies and the prospect of years of service in a fever-ridden station in the West Indies, desertion was widespread. The standard wage of a shilling a day was increased to thirteen pence in 1800, and this remained the basic wage until 1867. Sixpence a day was stopped for rations, and a soldier was subject to other stoppages of pay for lost kit or the milder scale of punishment. As part of the reform of the British army, soldiers began to be housed in barracks in the 1790s, but the earlier system of billeting troops on local inhabitants persisted into the 19th century. Punishments were ferocious and usually physical, and included the wooden horse, the black hole, porcupine drill, the branding of deserters, and transportation. At the pinnacle of the disciplinary code was hanging, which was awarded for a range of offences, but the most common punishment for several centuries was flogging. Twenty-five lashes was the minimum, with a theoretical maximum of 1500 lashes although there are records of 2000 lashes being awarded late in the 18th century. Flogging was well known to civil as well as military law. During the Napoleonic Wars protests were made in the House of Commons against flogging in the army, and in 1812 the Duke of York forbade regimental courts martial from awarding more than 300 lashes, although district and general courts martial retained the discretionary award of more severe punishment. In 1855 the maximum number of lashes awarded by any court martial was reduced to fifty, and in 1868 this was restricted further to crimes committed on active service. Total abolition did not come until 1881.

The British army of the late 18th and part of the 19th centuries largely comprised an officer corps of often aristocratic amateurs in command of the social sweepings of the industrial cities and the dispossessed rural poor, and many men enlisted as a means of escaping debt, poverty, or gaol. 'I do not know what the enemy will make of them', Wellington once said, 'but by God they frighten me'. Poorly trained, inadequately led and abominably treated, the peacetime British army was not a formidable military force.