The island of Bougainville in the South Pacific was the site of one of the largest and most gruelling campaigns fought by Australian forces during the Second World War. During the offensive against the Japanese from November 1944 to August 1945, more than 500 Australians were killed and two Victoria Crosses were awarded. A veteran later described Bougainville as ‘one long bloody hard slog’. Despite this, little is known about the campaign, which was dismissed as an unnecessary and costly operation.

In the first major study of the Bougainville campaign since publication of the official history in 1963, Karl James argues that it was in fact a justifiable use of Australia’s military resources. He draws on original archival research, including wartime reports and soldiers’ letters and diaries, to illustrate the experience of Australian soldiers who fought in the campaign. James shows that it fulfilled the Australian Government’s long-standing plans for victory in the Second World War.

Generously illustrated with more than forty photographs, this important book tells the story of a campaign often overlooked or ignored in Australia’s military history.

Karl James is Senior Historian in the Military History Section at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.
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Australians in the Bougainville Campaign, 1944–45

Karl James
For my grandparents Doug (N265505) and Coral James,  
Tom and Nan (W/193451) McLaughlin,  
and their generation who fought the Second World War
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ABBREVIATIONS

AAWFA  Australians at War Film Archive
ADC    aide-de-camp
AIB    Allied Intelligence Bureau
AIF    Australian Imperial Force
ANGAU  Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit
ANZAC  Australian New Zealand Army Corps
Arty   artillery
Aust   Australian
AWM    Australian War Memorial
Bde    brigade
Bn     battalion
Brig   brigadier
CARO   Central Army Records Office
Comd   commander
Coy    company
CPD    Commonwealth Parliament Debates
Div    division
DSO    Distinguished Service Order
Fwd    Forward
GOC    General Officer Commanding
Inf    infantry
Lt-Col Lieutenant-Colonel
Maj    Major
NAA    National Archives of Australia
NCO    non-commissioned officer
NGIB   New Guinea Infantry Battalion
NLA    National Library of Australia
PIB    Papuan Infantry Battalion
RNZAF  Royal New Zealand Air Force
SWPA   South West Pacific Area
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I hope this book will not disappoint.