
INTRODUCTION

For more than half a century I have been researching and writing about Australian military history, defence policy and intelligence. My first major article, written while I was a cadet at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, in 1969, was on General William Sherman's command during the Atlanta campaign in the United States Civil War.¹ Since then I have written or edited thirty-five books and almost a hundred journal articles or book chapters. In these, my primary focus has been on two inter-related issues: strategy and command.

Strategy is the key issue in considering Australia's experience of war. Strategy is the national policy developed by the government to achieve its required outcome. Strategic decisions include the decision to go to war, the nature of the forces to be committed to the war, where the forces should be deployed, and when to reduce the Australian commitment. The latter questions are examined in chapters 8 and 9. The decision to go to war (Gulf War in 1991) is discussed in chapter 12.

Strategic decisions are also made during peacetime, when the government decides how Australia is to be defended, how much to spend on defence, and what sort of forces should be developed. These issues are covered in chapters 2 and 4, and the impact of peacetime decisions is examined in chapter 13, which covers the problems faced by the Australian Defence Force in East Timor.

Australia's strategy has often been part of a wider allied strategy, either because of Australia's place in the British Empire, or more recently as part

of the United States or Western Alliance. This raises questions as to how much influence Australia can have over allied strategy (see chapter 7).

Most books about Australian military history focus purely on operations and battles, often with a particular emphasis on the experience of individual service men and women. Few books are concerned with strategy, even though ultimately it is the strategy that decides where and how the forces are employed. I have dealt with these issues in many of my books, including *High Command*, *Inside the War Cabinet* and the peacekeeping official histories.

Command is the mechanism by which the outcomes required by the government's strategy are turned into action on the battlefield. Commanders at the highest level are at the civilian–military interface. They advise the government and receive their orders from the government. They then produce their plans and deliver their orders to commanders at the operational level, who are required to produce their own plans to achieve the government's aims through military operations at the tactical level. We see the military advisers' role in chapters 5, 8 and 9. When Australian forces are operating as part of a larger coalition force, Australian commanders face particular challenges (see chapter 7). In the First World War the Australian Government sought to have Australian officers appointed to higher command positions, not just for matters of national prestige but also because they were more likely to be responsive to direction by the Australian Government (see chapter 2).

Few books deal specifically with Australian command problems, although biographies of higher-level commanders inevitably focus on them. In my biographies of top military commanders Thomas Blamey and John Wilton, and the influential Defence Secretary Frederick Shedden, I have explored these issues in greater depth. While the personalities and capabilities of commanders are important, command structures also play a key role. For a discussion of more recent developments, see chapter 14. Unlike in the First World War, in the Second World War the Australian Government established a war cabinet and invited the military chiefs to attend to tender their advice (see chapter 5). By the time of the Vietnam War it was realised that a single officer was needed to command the joint Australian services serving overseas (see chapter 11).

In my journal articles, book chapters and conference papers over several decades I sought to bring together my research and consideration of these important issues. Often it was the conference organiser or book editor who spurred me into thinking about a particular issue. In this book I bring together fourteen previously published journal articles,

book chapters and conference papers to illustrate the strategy and command issues in the Boer War, the two world wars, the Korean and Vietnam wars, the Gulf War and the commitment to East Timor in 1999. Although the chapters have been previously published, they are unlikely to have been read by present-day readers and are not widely available. I have taken the opportunity to update the chapters to take into account recent scholarship.

The book does not pretend to be a comprehensive history of Australian strategic and command issues since Federation; rather it presents a series of snapshots that might serve to highlight some of the issues. It is a reminder of what the great American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan wrote in 1908: 'If the strategy be wrong, the skill of the general on the battlefield, the valour of the soldier, the brilliancy of the victory, however otherwise decisive, fail of their effect.'²