

# War Historians & Correspondents and their contribution to our history

by Tony James

THE Royal Australian Mint has released its 2011 coin in the series "Australia Remembers." The series recognizes those who have made history beyond the battlefields. This year's 20 cent piece commemorates the War Historians, acknowledging those who recorded history and at the same time recognising those "who have shaped our perception of conflicts since the Boer War".

The Mint comments that "Charles Edward Woodrow (C.E.W.) Bean, Australia's first official correspondent of the First World War and founder of the Australian War Memorial, and Damien Parer, whose memorable images from the Kokoda Track preceded his death in the line of duty, both exemplify an honourable occupation, distinguished by bravery and integrity".

## The picture 2/8<sup>th</sup> battalion in Wewak

The image on the front of the coin holder shows members of A Company 2/8 Infantry Battalion which assaulted "The Blot" with B Company in support, being interviewed by Mr L.O'Dwyer war correspondent, at a shell crater on the top of "The Blot" in the Wewak area of New Guinea on July 14 1945. The 2/8th landed in New Guinea on 12 November 1944 and advanced on Wewak, clearing the Japanese from the Prince Alexander Range between April and July 1945. The capture of Mount Shiburangu on 27 June was the battalion's greatest achievement of the campaign. After the capture of Shiburangu, the 2/8<sup>th</sup> was ordered to take the highest ground which at 1650ft was 1,000 yards farther south, named by the Australians as "The Blot" after the nickname of Lieutenant Trethowan whose skilful leadership was largely responsible for the capture of Shiburangu. Journalist L. O'Dwyer of the *Brisbane Telegraph* interviewed the diggers after they had successfully taken "The Blot" by 11.00 am on July 14. Records show O'Dwyer, apart from working for the *Brisbane Telegraph*, was also attached to the Australian Department of Information during the war.

## Mark V Tank

The coin shows an Australian official photographer standing with tripod and camera on a British Mark V tank recording the advance of Australian troops through the Hindenburg line during World War I. The British Mark V came into the fighting in 1917 and one version was able to carry 24 infantry, becoming the first armoured personnel carrier to be used in warfare.

## War Historians of Australia

War historians and war correspondents have often been one and the same; however they fulfill the roles at different times. The



Reverse of the 3rd release in the Royal Australian Mint's "Australia Remembers" series. This 2011 20c commemorates Australia's war correspondents. Image courtesy of the Royal Australian Mint.

historian is charged with recording the facts of the situation and presenting their research and will usually be afforded assistance by the government for information and research. The war correspondent owes first allegiance to his employer and may not only be subject to official censorship but also editorial review and comment. However because of their proximity to an action were recruited to write official histories once the war was over.

## War Histories WWI & WWI series AWM

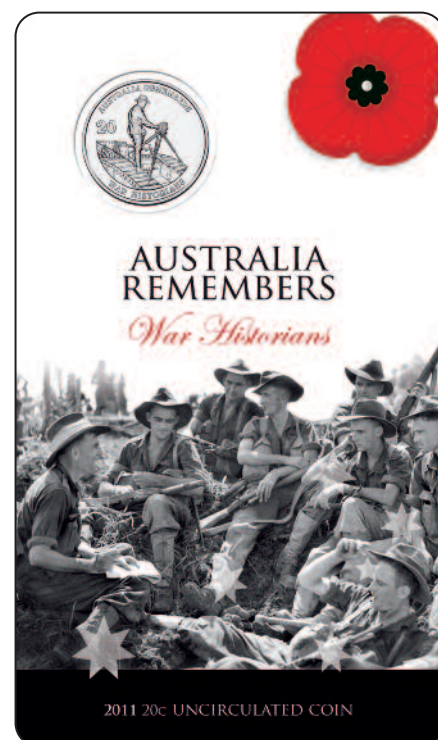
The four series of official war histories of Australia were commissioned by the government and sponsored by the Australian War Memorial. The War Memorial founded in 1917- at least the War Records Section, sources the authors and provided the research facilities for them.

Six of the 12 volumes of the WWI series were written by C.E.W.Bean. Bean also edited the series (1920-1942) and added a further volume "Gallipoli Mission" in 1948. There is also an "Official History of the Australian Army Medical Services, 1914-1918" in three volumes.

The 22 volumes of the WWII series included sections on the Army, Navy Air Force and Medical Services. Edited by Gavin Long and written by 14 authors, they were published over a 25 year period between 1952 and 1977.

The two volume Korean War history was written by historian Dr Robert O'Neill AO. Published in 1981 and 1985, the work focused on strategic and diplomatic interaction that led to the war 1950 to 1953.

"The Official History of Australia's Involvement in South East Asian Conflicts 1948-1975" was edited by Dr Peter Edwards AM and comprises nine volumes, of which eight have so far been published.



The coin holder for the Royal Australian Mint's "Australia Remembers" coin commemorating Australia's war correspondents. The image on the front shows members of A Company 2/8 Infantry Battalion being interviewed by war correspondent L.O'Dwyer in the Wewak area of New Guinea on 14 July 14, 1945. Image courtesy of the Royal Australian Mint.

A work in progress is the "Official History of Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Post Cold War Operations" presently being completed in five volumes under a joint project between the AWM and Australian National University with a grant from the Australian Research Council.

## Australian war correspondents-

From the Maori Wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to Afghanistan in the 21<sup>st</sup>, Australia has been represented by the media often right on the front line of action. Many Australian journalists covered wars for media in other countries, such as Chester Wilmot who wrote for the BBC and Damien Parer for Paramount News.

Howard Willoughby, who has been described as the first Australian war correspondent, covered the Maori Wars for the *Argus* during the 1860s, accompanying the troops under General Cameron in the campaign against the Maoris in New Zealand.

W. J. Lambie of the *Melbourne Age*, *Adelaide Advertiser* and *Sydney Daily Telegraph* went to the Sudan with the NSW contingent in 1885, and was later killed in South Africa during the Boer War.





Famous Australian poet, Andrew Barton ("Banjo") Paterson was also one of Australia's early war correspondents. He reported the Boer War in South Africa and the Boxer Rebellion in China. Image: Wikimedia Commons.

### Boer War

Donald A Macdonald was the first Australian war correspondent at the South African Boer War. Sent by *The Argus*, he was at the Siege of Ladysmith and ended up accompanying his dispatches home when he was evacuated because of illness.

Andrew B. (Banjo) Paterson was commissioned by *The Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Melbourne Age* as their war correspondent and sailed for South Africa in October 1899. He covered the surrender of Bloemfontein, the capture of Pretoria and the relief of Kimberley. Brought to the attention of the Reuters news agency, he became their correspondent too. He also covered the Boxer Rebellion in 1901 for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. During WWI Paterson hoped to cover the fighting in Europe, but ended up driving an ambulance before returning to Australia in 1915. He later became an honorary vet on board troopships and in October 1915 was commissioned into the Australian 2<sup>nd</sup> Remount Unit in the AIF. After the war



Keith (later Sir Keith) Murdoch was correspondent for the *Melbourne Herald* during WWI. His criticism at the British Army's conduct of the Gallipoli campaign caused much embarrassment in official circles. Image: Wikimedia Commons.

he contributed to the *Sydney Mail* and *Smith's Weekly* and became editor of the *Sydney Sportsman*.

Official correspondent for the Australian Military Forces, Charles Edward Bean was present at Gallipoli for the duration of the campaign. This photograph shows Bean standing atop the Great Pyramid of Cheops in Egypt on New Year's Day 1915. The photo was taken by fellow correspondent, Philip Schuler. Image: Wikimedia Commons.



### World War I

World War I was global in more ways than warfare. Australians were aware of their British heritage and wanted news even if it took time to get across the world. The press was well represented as newspapers vied for firsthand accounts of what "Our Boys Are Doing"

Phillip (known as Peter) Schuler from the *Melbourne Age* and Charles Patrick Smith of *The Argus* were allowed to report from Gallipoli for a month during July and August. Smith was one of the nominees for the position of Official War Correspondent but was beaten to the job by Charles Bean. Keith Murdoch, representing the *Melbourne Herald*, dropped in on Gallipoli in September on his way to London and was another close contender.

Having been selected by ballot to be the official correspondent for the Australian Military Forces, Bean, who had been the *Sydney Morning Herald* London correspondent before the war, travelled to Egypt with the first contingent of Australian Imperial Force and was ashore at Anzac Cove at about 10.00am on 25 April 1915. He remained there until the withdrawal in December and his on the spot observations gave him a head start when he was asked to write and edit the Australian Official History of WWI.

### Inter world war years

Ronald Monson became a cadet on the *West Australian* in 1925 covered the Spanish Civil War and Sino-Japanese War for the London *Daily Telegraph*. In 1938 he returned to Sydney and a year later represented the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* and *Melbourne Argus* on the French Front at the beginning of WWII. His work took him





During World War I photographs such as this one helped fulfill the public need to know "what the boys were doing." This image is taken from a contemporary postcard.

to Egypt, Greece Iraq and Burma. He was with the troops at the landings on D Day and was present when Allied troops entered Bergen-Belsen concentration camp which left a lasting impression on him.

## World War II

Gavin M. Long joined the *Argus* in 1926, moved to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1931 and was in London at the outbreak of WWII. After Dunkirk he was recalled to Australia and in March 1943 he was appointed general editor of the Official History of Australia in WWII, spending the last three years of the war in Canberra planning, consulting and recruiting authors and staff. Long wrote three of the seven volumes devoted to the Army and supervised 13 other authors writing the 22 volume series. Another contribution was through his criticism of the standard of Australian government publications and he joined with others to produce the official Style Manual in 1966. Gavin Long was awarded an OBE in 1953 and a member of the Greek Order of the Phoenix in 1956.

Kenneth A. Slessor, war correspondent and poet, was appointed official war correspondent by the Commonwealth Government in February 1940. He covered North Africa until 1943, when he was transferred to New Guinea. He clashed with General Blamey over his portrayal of the situation on the front and when the Army demanded removal of his accreditation, he resigned in protest and returned to become editor at his old newspaper, *The Sun*. He was eventually proved correct in his report; however the military claimed his scalp, yet another of several correspondents to fall prey to challenging the censor.

Damien Peter Parer was a war photographer and widely known for his pictures of New Guinea during WWII. Employed by the AIF Film Unit, part of the Department of Information, he also accompanied troops to the Middle East. He recorded the battle of Bardia in Libya, then Derna and the siege of Tobruk, as well as the Greek and Syrian campaigns. When Australian forces were recalled for the New Guinea campaign, Parer filmed operations around Wau and Salamaua and the Australian withdrawal along the Kokoda Track. This film was released as the "Kokoda Front Line"

newsreel and in 1943 was commended by the US Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences "for distinctive achievement in documentary production." The documentary filmed by Parer edited by Terry Banks and produced by Ken Hall, was awarded an Oscar in 1943. Parer resigned from DOI and in 1943 joined Paramount News. He married in March 1944 and six months later was killed covering the American invasion of Peleliu Island.

Alan Moorehead OBE, an Australian, based in the UK, was a war correspondent for the London *Daily Express*. He covered campaigns in Europe, Asia and the Mediterranean. His book "Gallipoli" published in 1956, established his reputation as a historical writer. Moorehead became a household name for military histories and biographies

Reginald William Winchester (Chester) Wilmot was a correspondent with the ABC, reporting on the Middle East during 1940-41, after which he returned to become the ABC's principal correspondent in the Pacific. He joined Damien Parer and Osmar White of the *Herald and Weekly Times* on the Kokoda Track and his critical comments about the lack of support for the front line troops during the campaign led to the cancellation of his accreditation by General Blamey. The ABC supported him and it was rumoured that when Blamey planned to have Wilmot conscripted into the army, he was offered a position with the BBC in 1944 and landed in France with the airborne troops on D-Day. Described as a pioneer of interviews with eye witnesses, he combined these with his articulate powerfully spoken accounts, often with the sounds of battle in the background.

## Department of Information - censorship

During WWII the Department of Information was concerned with the control and direction in matters of government policy to the media throughout Australia, as well as direction for film production. The department supplied dispatches and photographs from war correspondents and provided background guidance for the press. It also supplied information to the Australian News and Information Bureau New York and other government information departments in British and allied countries.

## Korea

Jack Lawson Glassop served in WW2, spending 18 months in Cairo on the army newspaper "AIF News." He then joined the army press unit writing for "Table Tops" an army newspaper published in Atherton Queensland, while at the same time writing a novel, "We were the Rats" inspired by Tobruk. After WWII he joined the *Sydney Morning Herald* and from October 1950 to March 1951 was a war correspondent in Korea.

Alan Dower served as a commando captain in Timor during WWII, and became a war correspondent for the *Melbourne Herald* during the Korean War. His claim to fame was preventing the execution by the South Korean police of women and children who were supposed collaborators, a scandal that caused a wave of disillusionment amongst the Australian public with the South Korean regime and with the war in general.

Harry Gordon, who joined the *Melbourne Sun News* in 1949, was one of the youngest war correspondents in Korea. His reputation for identifying good reporters and himself being able to put the listener or reader in an eyewitness position made him an outstanding journalist. It was in his role as official historian for the Australian Olympic Committee that he excelled and was awarded the CMG and AM for services to journalism as well as several awards from the Australian and International Olympic Committees.

## Vietnam

War correspondents covering the Vietnam War were in many ways a new breed of journalist. Vietnam was the first television war, the first war to use photo agencies, the first war with no censorship and first war that was influenced by the media.

Tim Page, combat photographer for *United Press International* and *Agence France Presse*, was one of many who were wounded, often severely, in their search for the elusive best picture. His close colleague Martin Stuart-Fox also worked for UPI. Household names like Neil Davis, Denis Gibbons, Alan Ramsey, Tim Bowden and Mike Willesee were just some of nearly 100 Australian reporters who were in Vietnam. The ABC had 30 staff in Saigon alone, one of whom was Don Hook. Hook described the freedom that correspondents enjoyed and the lack of Censorship - the only ground rule was that reporters could not report on matters that might place operations in jeopardy.

## Women correspondents

During WWII several Australian women gained accreditation as war correspondents. Adele Sheldon-Smith of the *Women's Weekly* was the first woman correspondent to be sent to Malaya. Alice Jackson was also given war correspondent status and sent regular reports back to the *Weekly* from overseas. There were other women who were given accreditation such as Mary Armitage who represented News Limited Adelaide.



covered the Falklands conflict for the *Melbourne Age*, Cameron Forbes covered the Peoples Power revolution that toppled Marcos in the Philippines and Peter Ellingsen was at the Tiananmen Square massacre. Today, Iraq and Afghanistan provide the present generation of war correspondents with material in a new format, now that the war is brought directly into our homes live from the countries and combat areas. Satellites phones, camcorders, mobile phones and websites mean instantaneous coverage and its old news if it's more than a few hours old.

All this from a 20 cent coin? Well, I got caught up in the story! We read the papers, listen to the news and watch television each day and it's rarely good news. Some may say why report wars and conflict? Wait for the book written by the historian or the correspondent. These special people should be remembered and acknowledged for the part they play in the way Australia Remembers.

#### References

Web references to multi-format ARC research by Dr Fay Anderson and Dr Richard Trembath resulting in publication of *"Witnesses to War, The History of Australian Conflict reporting"* published April 2011 Melbourne University Press  
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*Australian Dictionary of biography* online edition  
*National Library of Australia Online*  
*National Archives of Australia online digital copies*  
[En.wikipedia.org](http://En.wikipedia.org)

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*In pre-television days newspapers reported with a relatively high degree of immediacy. This front page of the Sydney Daily Sun was printed the day after the Armistice came into effect.*

While Dorothy Drain, of the *Australian Women's Weekly* during the Vietnam War, was among the first women to join male correspondents at the front.

Jill Jolliffe was the first journalist to reach the East Timorese capital Dili to report on the deaths of the five journalists, (Balibo Five) on October 16, 1975. She had had lunch with three of them the day they left to cover the insurgency around East Timor's border with Indonesian territory in

1975. Her book was a damning indictment of Indonesia's claims that it was not responsible for the atrocity and of Australia's acquiescence in the subsequent invasion. It also sparked complaints she had been unfair to some of those who had worked behind the scenes for justice over the murders.

#### More modern reporting

Australians have continued to be in the forefront of war reporting, Peter Smark