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***Australia's
Military
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by David Horner



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Dedication

To the men and women of the Australian Defence Force, who serve the nation at home and overseas with professionalism, dedication and sacrifice.

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Foreword

It has been very pleasing over the past decade to see greater interest in Australian military history. During this time, attendance of Australians at Anzac Day services, Remembrance Day events, and individual war and battle commemorations has risen. Additionally, increasing numbers of books, television programs and movies have chronicled some of our most important and iconic battles. I consider this to be vitally important, because sadly, as the years go by, we are losing our direct link to our past. Already gone are our Veterans from the First World War and the number of Second World War, Korea and Vietnam Veterans diminishes every year. As the experience of these wars continues to recede, it is essential that we remember and honour these major aspects of our military history which saw the tragic loss of more than 100,000 Australian men and women. This is a debt we owe to all those who have sacrificed their life for our nation.

Additionally, as the Chief of the Defence Force, I am very happy that our increased commitments over the past decade have meant that we are currently enjoying a rejuvenated interest in the Australian Defence Force (ADF), our people and our operations. I firmly believe that Australia's armed forces are more professional, more capable and more ready to respond to unexpected demands than at any time in our history.

In the first decade of the 21st century the ADF has once again been at war. Following the 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, Australian Special Forces took part in a 12-month deployment to Afghanistan in order to deny the country as a safe haven for terrorists. In support of this operation, other units, including ships and aircraft, went to nearby areas in the Persian Gulf. In 2005, ADF men and women went back to Afghanistan and since then our people have made contributions to international campaigns against terrorism, countering piracy in the Gulf of Aden and maritime security in the Middle East Area of Operations. Additionally, in 2003, Australian forces also took part in one of the most complex operations ever undertaken by the ADF — Operation CATALYST. During the course of this six-year operation, thousands of Australian servicemen and women were instrumental in developing a secure and stable Iraq.

We have also had an increased commitment to peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. Over the past two decades Australia has been involved in more than two dozen other peacekeeping missions. Our largest was in 1999, when the ADF led the International Force for East Timor, which

was our most significant military undertaking since the Second World War. We have also contributed to many humanitarian emergency relief operations both here at home and around the world. In 2009 alone, we assisted with the Victorian Bushfires, the Samoan earthquake, the Tongan Ferry Sinking, a plane accident in Papua New Guinea and the earthquake in Padang, Indonesia.

In all manner of operations our men and women in uniform have been at the forefront of Australia's engagement with the world. When I visit our people on operations I am struck by their courage, professionalism, dedication and pride in serving the nation. They are conscious of our military history and want to uphold the high standards of those who have served before them.

In this book David Horner, Professor of Australian Defence History at the Australian National University, provides a comprehensive but accessible guide to Australian military history. He has undertaken a significant service in explaining how the Australian military has served the nation in war and peace for more than two centuries. He explains what it means to serve in the military and chronicles Australia's role in all our wars and campaigns. I am particularly pleased that he has included vivid and detailed accounts of Australia's most recent operations. This is a scholarly book written by a highly skilled and knowledgeable author. Those familiar with the ADF and our operations will delight in the detail and insight Professor Horner provides.

Equally important though, is that his easy-to-read style and detailed narrative ensures that this book will also appeal to readers without any background knowledge or military experience. The hallmark of the *For Dummies* books is that they are written by experts. I am delighted that the publishers have seen fit to include Australian military history among their list of publications, thus making this aspect of Australian history more accessible to all Australians.

I commend this book to all readers. I consider it to be vitally important that all Australians understand and appreciate the role of the men and women of the ADF — both past and present — in keeping our nation and our national interests secure. I am immensely proud of every one of them, and the people of Australia should be too.

A G Houston, AC, AFC
Air Chief Marshal
Chief of the Defence Force
June 2010

Introduction

Few countries celebrate their military history with as much enthusiasm as Australia. Most Australians possess at least a vague knowledge of the landing at Gallipoli in 1915 and the fighting on the Kokoda Trail in 1942. If you have ever glanced at television on Anzac Day you would be aware of some of the great iconic names of Australian military history. But for the average Australian the details of their military history can be daunting. And this is a shame, because Australians know that their military history is important.

Sure, plenty of good books are available to read, but most tell the story of just one aspect. The real challenge is to grasp the broad sweep of Australian military history — to understand why the nation went to war, why Australians were willing to sacrifice their lives, and how Australia's involvement in war has helped shape and form our society.

I have a passion for Australian military history, which is just as well because I earn my living writing books about it. But I enjoy it not because it pays the bills. I would write about Australian military history even if I were not paid (but don't tell my publishers). I'm enthralled by Australian military history because in the most dramatic and exciting manner it tells the story of who we are as Australians. There is nothing like the stress of battle to bring out the true character of a person, just as there is nothing like a war for survival to test the mettle of a nation.

About This Book

The essence of writing history is to decide what to leave out. Obviously I cannot include every battle or issue in this book. However, the story of Australia's experience of war is not as extensive as, say, Britain, France or the United States. Australia was settled by Europeans not quite two and a quarter centuries ago. Australia has never had a civil war like the United States, nor has it been invaded like France, or fought numerous colonial wars like Britain. So with judicious selection I am able to include every war and military campaign conducted by the Australian armed forces, even though it might be mentioned only briefly. If you have heard of a particular large battle or campaign you will probably find it mentioned in this book,

and you will be able to see where it fits in the bigger picture. In other words, this book is a 'one-stop shop' for military history. If you don't know much about Australian military history, this is the place to start.

Military history is not just about dates and names of units. To understand why military history is important we need to answer some questions:

- ✓ Why did Australia become involved in a particular war?
- ✓ Why was the campaign or battle conducted in a particular way?
- ✓ What are the connections between the different battles and campaigns?
- ✓ How did a particular battle affect the soldiers?
- ✓ What did a battle or campaign achieve?
- ✓ What effect did a battle, campaign or war have on the development of Australia?

To answer these questions I have focused on the how and the why. You might not always agree with my conclusions, but they will at least provide a starting point for debate.

Conventions Used in This Book

Military history is full of its own peculiar conventions. For example, military units — squadrons, battalions, brigades, divisions, fleets — are usually described in particular ways. I have used these conventions, but you don't need to know them. (I explain what all these units mean in Chapter 2.) However, some conventions in writing military history make sense. Certain facts about a battle need to be explained before we can answer some of the questions posed in the preceding section. These include:

- ✓ What was the battle trying to achieve?
- ✓ What military units were involved?
- ✓ Who was in charge?
- ✓ What actually happened during the battle?
- ✓ How many casualties did our forces suffer?

In describing most of the battles mentioned in this book I have tried briefly to set out the answers to these basic questions before I get on to the more interesting issues of how and why things turned out the way they did.