



LIEUTENANT GENERAL DAVID MORRISON, AO CHIEF OF THE AUSTRALIAN ARMY

Chief of Army address to launch the *Centenary History of Australia and the Great War* series, Canberra, 17 October 2014.

Check against delivery.

We approach the beginning of what will be a five-year period of commemorative activity. Major anniversaries in the past – the Bicentenary of 1988 was the largest – aroused controversy in the years before the event but the commemoration itself was over and done with during a single calendar year.

Not so this time. Yes, the centenary of the Gallipoli landing will be climactic, but that won't be the end of it. There'll still be occasion to recall all those battles on the Western Front, the heroic charges in the Middle East, and perhaps most tragic of all, the Peace Conference of 1919 and the signing of the Treaty of Versailles; which amounted to little more than a guarantee of another, even worse war a few years on.

So how should we recall the last 100 years of war?

Thoughtful people must necessarily be divided souls over Anzac, including its iterations in the forthcoming centenaries. I am sure that few of us would argue that we should forget the First World War, or indeed the wars of the last century more generally. Recalling war is a precondition for understanding it, including its awful consequences.

However, amid the drum-beating of the high priests of the cult of Anzac and Great War, there is also thoughtful, critical and respectful commentary, and well-researched, well-written history. The *Centenary History of Australia and the Great War* is a great example of this.

It is a five volume series that tells the story of Australia and the war with the aid of recent perspectives and assumptions. It draws on evidence and materials; some of which were not available to CEW Bean and his official authors in the 1920s and 1930s. It is important to note that this series isn't trying to replicate or replace Bean's official history; but rather to present the Great War to a new generation of readers in ways attuned to them and their likely expectations.

The series draws on a group of historians, mostly drawn from UNSW Canberra and reflects the leading position of this group at this university and campus within the writing and teaching of military history in this country.

The partnership with a leading international academic publisher – Oxford University Press – is a further sign of the quality and importance of the series.

The first volume, '*Australia and the War in the Air*' by Michael Molkenntin is an important first volume in this series as it permits an unfettered evaluation of Aviation's, and specifically Army Aviation's, role in the War. After all, the origins of military aviation in Australia and the origins of Army aviation in Australia overlap. The treatment of the Australian Flying Corps as a stand-alone volume within the series is therefore entirely appropriate.

This first volume is pioneering as it overturns the common narrative of the air war – the red baron, flying aces, silk scarves in the slipstream. Instead it looks at air action at the operational level and the way that this interacted with the other components of the war effort in the various theatres.

Michael also contextualises the Australian Flying Corps's activities within the broader Imperial context of which it was a part and without which much of the most important aspects remain obscured. He also shows how the Australian Flying Corps developed and became more effective and sophisticated in its application as an air weapon in line with developments in the wider air war context, and how Australian officers interpreted and understood this. The Great War experience defined the nascent RAAF when it was established in 1921 and this remained true until close to the outbreak of war in 1939.

Michael has drawn on a wide range of records in writing the book. His use of materials in Britain that the official historians could have utilised but for various reasons did not; as well as material which they could not have accessed at the time in which they wrote has resulted in a fresh and absorbing perspective on Australia's involvement in the Great War.

It now gives me great pleasure to launch *Centenary History of Australia and the Great War* series, in particular, Michael's first volume '*Australia and the War in the Air*'.