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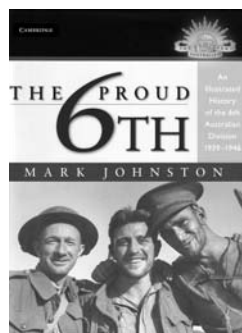
## **BOOK REVIEW**

### ***The proud 6th an illustrated history of the 6th Australian Division 1939–1946***

by Mark Johnston

Cambridge University Press: Melbourne,  
2008, 269 pp., ISBN 13 978-0-521-51411-8  
RRP \$41.96 (hardcover)

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The 6<sup>th</sup> Australian Division was the first infantry division to be raised as part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Imperial Force following the declaration of war in 1939. This history of the division combines a compelling treatment of the human level of military operations, an attractive writing style that makes complex war situations readily understandable, and an excellent use of photographs from war archives and personal diaries – all of which combine to make this a most impressive and highly readable book.

The author explains the reasons for the formation of the division in 1939 and then traces its very considerable battle prowess and achievements throughout the war in 12 chapters. It commences with the division's formation in 1939, then addresses chronologically its time in the Middle East – involving campaigns in the Western Desert [Bardia, Tobruk, Benghazi], Greece, Crete and Syria – its return to Australia, its commitment first to the Papua campaign [Kokoda Trail, Wau-Salamau] and later to the New Guinea campaign [Aitape-Wewak], and concludes with the wind-down period at war's end.

While the geopolitical and strategic situation is covered to provide context, the focus is at the tactical level of operations, underpinned by exhaustive research into unit and individual diaries. The bulk of the analysis is on the human implications at unit, sub-unit and individual soldier level. Each chapter commences with a very clear summary of the campaign described therein, well-illustrated by clearly readable maps and sketches. Well-selected photographs are used to hold the story together and to provide real insights into the human cost of each operation. Indeed, photographs of both Allied and Axis soldiers are used to illustrate their actual battle reactions and experiences, some of which are particularly compelling. For example, on p. 208 is a photograph of a sergeant who was killed shortly after the photograph was taken by a 'friendly' air supply drop!

The author tells a complex story in a most attractive and readable way, combining deep scholarship, great clarity of writing and a superb use of visual resources. *The proud 6<sup>th</sup>* enhances our understanding of one of the most prominent Australian formations of any war and would be an outstanding addition to any library, as well as an excellent way of engaging a newcomer in Australian military history. It is likely to bring the accomplishments of the 6<sup>th</sup> Division to the attention of a wide readership.

**Michael Hough**