

**Jump TO Article**



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**Jump TO Article**

# Honours and awards of the Army

by Major General Gordon Maitland

*Playbill/Military: Sydney; 2014; 248 pp.; ISBN 978-0-9925154-0-9; RRP \$35.99 (softcover)*<sup>1</sup>

*Ursula Davidson Library call number 813 MAIT 2014*



*Honours and Awards* is a beautifully written and presented compendium of the official awards and authorised unofficial awards, including foreign awards, which have been made to members of the Australian Army under both the former Imperial system and the more recent Australian system from colonial times to the present, including the most recently (2012) gazetted award, the Australian Operational Service Medal.

The author, Major General Gordon L. Maitland, AO, OBE, RFD, ED (Ret'd), is a former President, and now an Honorary Life Member and Councillor Emeritus, of the Royal United Services Institute of New South Wales. He has previously authored three books: *Tales of Valour from the Royal New South Wales Regiment* (Playbill, 1992); *The Second World War and its Australian Army Battle Honours* (Kangaroo Press, 1999); and the two-volume *The Battle History of the Royal New South Wales Regiment* (Kangaroo Press, 2001/2002). He has brought the same love of his subject, rigorous research and deft writing skill to this new book.

In presenting this concise encyclopaedic work, rather than listing the awards alphabetically, the author groups them with similar awards in chapters *e.g.* orders of chivalry; bravery and distinguished service awards; operational service medals; meritorious service and long service medals; and other awards. This enables him to embed the description of each award within excellent contextual material, to the extent that the book could be read from cover to cover. Within each chapter, the awards are listed chronologically. There is also a good index which allows readers to find an award where they know its name. If they only know the ribbon colour, it is a little harder. Unless the ribbon can be seen in the order of

precedence listing at the end of the book, readers need to guess the likely type of award and its era, and then peruse the relevant chapter and its associated colour plates to identify it.

The section on each award includes the purpose of the award; the eligibility criteria; and a description of the medal (obverse and reverse faces) and its ribbon. Any symbolism used on the medal and the significance of the colours in the ribbon are explained. In several places, false legends which have grown up around awards, such as the Victoria Cross, are debunked. There are superb colour plates which faithfully reproduce both faces of the medal and its ribbon, with great care taken to accurately reproduce the ribbon colours. The publisher, Brian Nebenzahl, is to be congratulated for the quality of these plates. The skill evident in the revival of the older images is quite remarkable.

In a concise reference work of this type, it is not always feasible to detail the sometimes complex eligibility criteria which for some awards were changed several times. Where readers desire this information they would need to refer to the relevant primary sources, usually the relevant Commonwealth Gazette(s). Unfortunately, except in a few places, the author does not list his sources nor does he include a bibliography, so the book provides little assistance to readers seeking to delve further into the subject or to check the accuracy of assertions made therein. This limitation notwithstanding, the reader can be confident the author has researched his subject diligently.

There are other books available which purport to cover similar ground to this one, but they are not presented in a format or at a price which will appeal in the way this one will to awardees seeking a ready reference. I commend it to them, to their families and to their descendants. I also commend it to anyone who wants to know how Australia has recognised its soldiers, how to identify individual awards or what the awards mean.

**David Leece**

<sup>1</sup>Available on line: [www.playbill.com.au/categories/Theatre/Military-Books](http://www.playbill.com.au/categories/Theatre/Military-Books) [\$35.99 plus postage & handling]