

## BOOK REVIEW:

# *Rallying the troops: a World War I commemoration*

## *Volume II: Enlist now – forward to victory* and *Volume III: Will you help?*

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*Ku-ring-gai Historical Society: Gordon, NSW*; 2015 (Vol. II), 2017 (Vol III); ISBN: 9780959867305 (Vol II), 9780959867312 (Vol III); RRP \$35.00 (Vol II), \$50.00 (Vol III)



The Ku-ring-gai Historical Society consists of community historians from northern Sydney. In a four-volume series<sup>2</sup>, they have sought to commemorate their community's contribution to the Great War.

A remarkable section in each volume covers those who enlisted from the Ku-ring-gai area. It includes each soldier's military service, next of kin and life story, including location and date of death, and where each is commemorated. Some 1800 servicemen have been identified to date. Most of those soldiers lie in a foreign field or at sea; only two were returned to Australia.

The compilation of these data has obviously been a labour of love and the result is a record of a community's contribution to war that is probably second to none at this level of detail. Where one exists, a photograph of the soldier is included, as is the occasional relevant document. The biographical entries reflect the commitment of both the series' researchers and the soldiers' relatives.

**Volume 1**, *The Trumpet Calls*, was reviewed in *United Service* 68 (3), 31 (September 2017). Released in 2014, it covered 1914-15, with biographical entries for those whose family names start with A to F. It provided information on the pre-war era, war memorials, the historian C. E. W. Bean, and the early campaigns (German New Guinea, Gallipoli), in a style suited to both the general reader and the researcher. It set the scene for the two volumes reviewed herein.

**Volume II**, released in 2015, is sub-titled *Enlist Now – Forward to Victory*. It covers the detailed preparation of the troops, now in uniform, and the campaigns which started in 1916. The first chapter provides an excellent coverage of Australian-based training which, for most of the enlistees, was undertaken in New South Wales. The authors use the 18th Battalion, to which many from Ku-ring-gai were posted, to illustrate the preparation for war in Australia. Another chapter deals with training in England pending deployment to the Western Front, about which little is written in Australian military history. The campaigns chapters include the Middle East operations in 1916-18 and then the Western Front, where the Battles of Fromelles, Pozières-Mouquet Farm and Bullecourt all featured Ku-ring-gai's soldiers. In the biographical section, soldiers with family names starting with G to K are

included. The success of Volume I led to the identification of further soldiers. These additional A-F names, without biographical details, are included in an addendum – the missing biographical details will be included in the final volume.

**Volume III**, sub-titled *Will You Help?*, was released in 2017 and follows the general design of the series. The excellent standard set by the previous volumes is again evident. Chapters address the conscription movement; the 1917 battles on the Western Front; and a well-crafted coverage of the human services support agencies which soldiers at war could scarce be without. Medical, religious, philanthropic and home front support are illustrated, with a focus on Ku-ring-gai people involved, both at home and overseas. This section does what many military histories cannot do – give a local context for the less obvious, but equally essential, human side of war. Ku-ring-gai owes much to the writing team, which has managed to capture the 'local' touch that is reflected in most Australian communities, but is rarely as well-documented. Soldiers with L to R surnames are covered this time, along with another addendum which picks up more names not known about during the publication of Volumes I and II. The same superb glossary allows this volume to stand alone, as is the case for the others.

Technically, the first three volumes are a first-class product, with indications being that the final volume will be as good. Many original photographs are presented to support imagery sourced from official sources. All are clear images, with accurate captions and attribution applied. Book layout, use of white space and general compilation bear the hallmark of a designer and publisher who know how to communicate visually with the reader. Well-positioned footnotes enable the reader to pursue more information.

The first three volumes of *Rallying the Troops* are incisive and deeply personable; Volumes II and III maintaining the standard set in the first volume. Most Australians today can relate to the collective commitment made, and the hurt suffered, by the Ku-ring-gai community. Collectively, all four volumes will constitute a remarkable collection that deserves its place, not only in every Ku-ring-gai household, but also in every institutional library across the nation. While it is a story of the Ku-ring-gai community, it is also Australia's story. The voluntary team that generated this contribution to Australia's military and social literature is to be commended, a fact reflected in the series of awards already won.

<sup>1</sup>These books can be purchased from the Society's website at [www.khs.org.au](http://www.khs.org.au).

<sup>2</sup>Volume IV: *Were You There Then?* is yet to be published.