

BOOK REVIEW:

The unit guide: the Australian Army 1939-1945

by Graham McKenzie-Smith

Big Sky Publishing: Newport, NSW; 2018; 6 volumes, 3000 pp.; ISBN 9781925675146 (hardback); six-volume set, RRP \$209.99; Ursula Davidson Library call number 580.2 UGAA 1/6 – 6/6.



Over 725,000 Australian men and women joined the Australian Army in World War II and served in one or more of the 5700 separate units which were formed in the Australian Imperial Force and the other Australian Military Forces. As well as the infantry, armour and artillery units, there were engineer, forestry, farming, transport, workshop, medical, survey, dental, postal, records and war graves units, as well as butchers, bakers and leave train cooking sections.

Only 409 (7 per cent) of these units have any published unit history and until now the descendants of these proud servicemen and servicewomen have had nowhere to go to find out what their ancestor did during the war.

The Unit Guide, in a six-volume boxed set, seeks to fill this gap with more than 5500 profiles of units in the Australian Army during the war (which between them had over 13,700 unit names). Each profile covers what is known of the unit's formation, role, organisation, movements, operations and place in the Army's hierarchy, including references to the unit's war diary at the Australian War Memorial and an extensive bibliography.

Further, there are orders of battle for most of Australia's significant campaigns or locations defended by Australian troops – such as the defence of New South Wales (February 1942), the siege of Tobruk, the 'Bird'

forces captured by the Japanese, units on the Kokoda Trail, operations in Borneo, and the British Commonwealth Occupation Force, Japan (April 1946), which will be invaluable to military historians and researchers. It is user friendly with comprehensive indices designed for readers without a military background.

In his foreword, the Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Angus Campbell, says "There is a place for *The Unit Guide* on the shelves of all secondary school, local and state libraries, RSLs, on genealogists' and military historians' shelves, and among the great history collections of this country".

Graham McKenzie-Smith is a retired forester who has been researching Australia's military history since his early career in Papua New Guinea. The 35 years of research behind *The Unit Guide* saw Graham examine all unit war diaries at the Australian War Memorial and many other sources to ensure it is as complete as the data allow. Graham's other books include the *Australia's Forgotten Army* series, books on the defence of Western Australia, and *Army Engineers in Western Australia*.

A reference work without peer, *The Unit Guide* will assist military historians, researchers, genealogists, history buffs and, most importantly, the general public, to navigate their way through the history of a large and complex organisation.

Marcus Fielding