

Anzac sniper

by Roland Perry

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At Gallipoli the enemy trenches were only some 20 metres apart, but Sniper's Ridge presented a much greater challenge. In trench warfare, a soldier could not always be certain he had hit an enemy. However, on Sniper's Ridge, Savige's job was to make sure he struck as many of the opposition as possible. Denied entry to officer training on enlistment because of inadequate levels of education, Stan Savige, or as he later became known, Lieutenant General Sir Stanley Savige, KBE, CB, DSO, MC, ED nevertheless remained ambitious. After two weeks on Gallipoli, he had received a tap on the shoulder by the battalion commander who advised him that he was to be promoted to company sergeant major, to be made official within a month. Almost in the same breath he asked if Savige would do a stint on Sniper's Ridge. *Anzac Sniper* is the biography of a truly great Australian who served his country in two world wars.

Roland Perry, OAM has published 34 books: from biographies to politics, espionage, military history, royalty and sport, including five novels. His sports books include biographies of Sir Donald Bradman, Steve Waugh, Keith Miller and Shane Warne. He was awarded the Fellowship of Australian Writers National Literary Award for non-fiction in 2004 for *Monash: The Outsider Who Won a War*. In 2011 he was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia, for services to literature, and was made a Fellow of Monash University. In 2012 he became Monash University's first Writer-in-Residence, lecturing PhD students on writing and Australian history.

Stan Savige was the son of a struggling butcher in Korumburra, in harsh times in rural Victoria. He left school at age 12 to work as a blacksmith's striker to provide additional income for the household. Inspired by newspaper stories of the Australian Light Horse, at 10, having lied about his age, Savige joined the military under the compulsory training system, which required applicants to be 12. When 17, he moved to Melbourne for employment, rising to middle management ranks in a retail company.

Savige was a devout scout leader and Sunday school teacher who initially refrained from enlistment until a passage in the Bible moved him to join up. An expert shot, he was extremely successful as a sniper and was subsequently promoted in the field to 2nd Lieutenant. When the forces were withdrawn from Gallipoli, Savige and his company were among the last to leave the peninsula.

On the Western Front he led small reconnaissance patrols into no-man's land at Fromelles and was appointed an Intelligence Officer because of his precise reporting and map drawing skills, qualities much appreciated by Brigade Commander Gellibrand. Savige

served in battles from Pozieres to Passchendaele, and was awarded the Military Cross for his action at Bullecourt, before being posted to the Middle East as a part of Dunsterforce.

Named after its commander, Major-General Dunster, the force fought the Turks in Persia (now northern Iran), and Savige was responsible for the protection of 80,000 fleeing Assyrians, for which he was awarded the DSO.

Savige joined the Militia in 1920 and in 1923 was responsible for the establishment of the Legacy organisation. At the same time, he progressed through the ranks in the Militia, reaching Colonel in 1938. He became firm friends with Blamey during this time, a friendship that became handy during World War II. Perry provides an interesting insight of the struggle between the regular army and the militia in the 1930's and its carry over into the war, distracting from the focus on the fighting in North Africa.

At the outbreak of war, Savige commanded the 17th Infantry Brigade and saw action at Bardia, North Africa. The author provides an interesting insight into the disputes between the former militia officers and members of the Staff Corps, who actively sought to undermine Savige's command. In Greece, Savige led with distinction during the strategic withdrawal of the Allied Forces in the face of overwhelming German firepower.

Returned to Australia when the 2nd AIF was recalled to face the Japanese, Savige was promoted to Major General and commanded the 3rd Division, charged with preparing it for war. Posted to New Guinea, Savige commanded the Salamaua - Lae campaign, withstanding opposition from the force commander, concerning his conduct of operations, eventually earning the award of the Companion of the Order of the Bath. Savige's sixth and final campaign of the war was Bougainville where Australian forces faced some 42,000 Japanese troops, and where, once again, he served with distinction.

Stan Savige was a remarkable Australian and Roland Perry recognises Savige's accomplishments, personal challenges and his humanity. *Anzac Sniper* is very well written, as expected from such a distinguished author. It is easy to read and readily absorbs the reader. In the telling of Savige's story, the reader is presented with interesting historical anecdotes, political manoeuvring and civil circumstances. *Anzac Sniper* is well indexed and has an interesting set of photographs and maps.

The story of Lieutenant General Sir Stanley Savige, KBE, CB, DSO, MC, ED is one which all Australians can be proud and deserves to be read. *Anzac Sniper* is enjoyable and will appeal to a wide range of readers.

Bob Treolar