



ANZAAB *Aspects of Book Collecting*

Collecting Australian Military History

Bradstreet's Books

Background: Australia's military history commenced, some would say, with the conflicts between native Aboriginals and white settlers. Perhaps a majority view would look at Australia's armed forces from pre-Federation times and the conflicts in which they participated from the Suakin Contingent to Iraq and Afghanistan.

Range: Some of the chief categories in Australian Military History would include Official Histories, Unit Histories, Biographies and a wide range of more general works. There is world-wide recognition of the quality of the Official Histories of the First and Second World War. Charles Bean's magisterial twelve-volume *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918* is now difficult to obtain in its original format and its three companion medical volumes are very rare indeed. Its Second World War successor is more common, but the volumes for Korea and Vietnam are surprisingly hard to find while being a vital primary reference.

Unit histories of the First and Second World Wars are now rare and expensive, even when they have occasionally been reprinted. Unit histories of the Vietnam era and later are fiendishly rare.

Many of the earlier biographical and general works are uneven and journalistic. Recent scholarship has produced high quality authors like Tom Frame, Chris Coultard, David Horner, John Coates and Jeffery Grey. *The Centenary of Australian Defence* series was a landmark reference, as has been the relatively recent series of books sponsored by The Army History Unit and published (though, in most cases, poorly publicised) by Oxford, Cambridge, Allen & Unwin and Australian Military History Publications.

There is a growing market in the more ephemeral military items such as posters, diaries, letters, instructional pamphlets and photograph albums.

Availability: Sadly, the better the book, the more likely it was to have a small print run and be close to unobtainable. There are, however, some specialist dealers who seem to be able to find titles for the especially patient buyer.

Price-range: \$20 to \$2000, with a strong bias towards the multiple hundreds for the rarer items.

Footnote: There are few extensive bibliographies—perhaps one of the more useful is Syd Tregellis-Smith & others, *Shaping History: A Bibliography of Australian Army Unit Histories* (1996, later reprints available).