

# An Atlas of Australia's Wars

John Coates

Reviewed by Neil James

Oxford University Press has republished four of the seven volumes of the *Australian Centenary History of Defence* series, first published in 2001 to celebrate 100 years of Commonwealth responsibility for national defence matters. Volumes 1-3: *The Australian Army* by Professor Jeffrey Grey, *The Royal Australian Air Force* by Dr Alan Stephens and *The Royal Australian Navy* by Dr David Stevens, are republished in softback format at \$39.95, a significant reduction in the original hardback price of \$59.95. The only difference in these three volumes is the subtitle, *A History*, added to each and the omission of the series introduction. These three histories remain good summary reference works in themselves but do not include coverage of military operations undertaken since 2000, such as the post 9/11 wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Volume 7, *An Atlas of Australia's Wars* by Lieutenant General John Coates (a former Chief of Army), on the other hand, is sumptuously republished as a fully updated second edition, again in large (43x21cm) casebound format.

The first edition ended with the operations in East Timor up to August 2001. Given the scope, size and complexity of this atlas no edition is ever going to be up to date in the case of ongoing operations. This edition is 36 pages or some 10 per cent longer, much but not all of this in an additional part covering operations since the end of the Cold War. The earlier chapters, covering wars now long over, have also been updated, many with additional maps and virtually all with extra text and updated bibliographies.

The new post-Cold War part includes the initial campaigns in Afghanistan (up to April 2002), Iraq (up to April 2003) and peacekeeping operations undertaken elsewhere up to August 2006. While the maps and accompanying text may not be entirely current for all areas of ongoing ADF operations, the chapter bibliographies on Afghanistan and Iraq include significant works published in 2005 and 2006.

Also of particular note is the updated Chapter One covering the frontier conflicts as Australia was colonised after 1788. This has been expanded and substantially updated to take into account subsequent detailed challenging of some of the more controversial works in this area cited in the first edition. In this regard General Coates has trod delicately where many historians now fear to tread at all. Even the most ardent advocate of either side in the raging dispute will be impressed by the calm, matter of fact and balanced coverage.

The heart of this book, however, is its 366 separate maps, mainly covering maritime, land and air operations undertaken by Australian forces. There is perhaps some degree of under-representation of air and maritime matters because they are often harder to depict graphically. The effort required to scope and prepare all these maps in the first place can only be imagined. The effort required to check and update them must

have been similarly immense. General Coates rightly thanks his cartographer, Keith Mitchell, for his superb efforts over both editions.

The structure of the atlas and the supporting scholarship throughout is excellent. Each small war has a chapter of its own. In the larger wars there are separate chapters for each major campaign (including notable Special Forces operations in World War II). The contents, maps and tables are clearly listed at the beginning. The military symbols used are clearly described and explained. Each of the six parts begins with a detailed chronology of the war or series of wars covered. Australian participation in multinational peacekeeping operations, Australian prisoners-of-war and Australian Victoria Cross (but strangely not George Cross) winners are covered in three appendices. A seven-page index is as comprehensive as an index can be in an atlas of this type. The bibliographies at the end of each chapter cover further reading for those seeking additional detail. The footnotes are kept to a minimum but are comprehensive and full of appropriate background detail.

This remains a beautifully presented and scholarly summary reference work. The new slip cover may only be plastic rather than cardboard but the binding itself is an improvement on the high standard of the first edition. While the atlas costs \$195.00 this is no increase on the price of the first edition despite the additional chapters, updating throughout and improved presentation.

The maps are clear and easily understood and the chapter summaries and annotations on the maps are very readable, balanced and accurate. In essence *An Atlas of Australia's Wars* is a superb stand-alone ready reference, in highly understandable language and graphics, for anyone seeking the outlines of military operations in Australia or conducted by Australians since 1788.

Every school, university, public and parliamentary library in Australia should hold this atlas. Any Australian with more than a passing interest in our military history will not begrudge purchasing one either. ♦

John Coates, *'An Atlas of Australia's Wars' (Second Edition)*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2006, Casebound with plastic slip cover, 424pp., RRP \$A195.00.

Jeffrey Grey, *'The Australian Army: A History'*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2006, Softback, 300pp., RRP \$A39.95.

Alan Stephens, *'The Royal Australian Air Force: A History'*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2006, Softback, 340pp., RRP \$A39.95.

David Stevens, *'The Royal Australian Navy: A History'*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2006, Softback, 336pp., RRP \$A39.95.

