

The Once and Future Army: A History of the Citizen Military Forces, 1947–1974

Dayton McCarthy

Reviewed by Neil James

From the departure of the last British regiment in 1870 until 1945 the story of the Australian Army, and its role in Australian society, is primarily one dominated by the contribution of the citizen soldier. Formations and units throughout this period had limited numbers of full-time (or regular) personnel, although the large wartime armies of 1918 and 1945 possessed most of the characteristics of professional regular armies.

Dayton McCarthy's excellent account explains why this inevitably changed over the three decades following World War II. The book, based on his 1997 PhD thesis, ends with the watershed Millar Report of 1971 and its partial implementation over the next few years. A short postscript summarises key developments until the present day.

This is both a scholarly study and an immensely readable and well-written account. The research is thorough and balanced, and the book fills a significant gap in the historical record. McCarthy's recounting and assessment of the often disparate views within and without the CMF/Army Reserve are measured and judicious. Most notably he lances most of the mutually antagonistic conspiracy theories expounded by some reservists and regulars.

From the viewpoint of the operational utility of the Army Reserve the book distils and superbly discusses several key themes including:

- the importance of its reserve component to the Army retaining the intimacy of its links to the wider civil community, both locally and nationally;
- the continual difficulties in recruiting and retaining junior ranks;
- the perpetual battle to balance the advantages and disadvantages of centralised versus decentralised (unit) training;
- the importance of middle-level NCO and junior officers in reserve units;
- the importance of employer incentives and legislative civilian job protection for military reservists, and the problems continually caused by inadequate measures;
- the fatal handicap caused by the Defence Act so severely restricting the operational employment of formed reserve units for so long (including the lost opportunity to employ a reserve unit in Vietnam);
- the bungling of several 'total Army' initiatives and schemes over the years; and
- the mutual suspicions and antagonisms fed by different perceptions of military professionalism, especially the financial cost of reserve units

balanced against the legislative restrictions on their employment, that continually handicap relations between the Army's reservist and full-time components.

McCarthy sets the CMF (and its Army Reserve successor) properly in its historical, cultural and demographic contexts. Two key threads skillfully woven throughout the book are the perpetual problem of populating the junior ranks of reserve units, and the constant decline in the numbers of experienced senior NCO to train and lead them. With only very temporary exceptions such as 1980, when the Fraser Government quickly expanded the Army Reserve but then failed to sustain it, reserve units have only approached full strengths when an element of conscription or unusual incentive has been involved.

In the 1950s national service scheme most 18-year old males underwent three months of full-time training in their first year (with strong echoes of the current system of common induction training) then three years in the active reserve followed by three years in the standby reserve. In the 1964–72 national service scheme, when only one in forty 20-year olds was liable for two years of full-time service in the regular army, the CMF was well populated by those potential conscripts who chose the option of serving five years as a reservist instead.

In the early 1990s, the comparatively small Ready Reserve Scheme resembled a form of voluntary national service with financial incentives replacing conscription. Ready Reservists underwent one year of full-time service followed by four years in the active reserve, and such units approached full strength in strong contrast to most general reserve units.

As McCarthy details, the 1950s national service scheme stretched both the Army's regular and reserve components but there were still enough experienced senior NCO (including 2nd AIF veterans) to make it work. In the 1960s scheme there was less of this senior NCO and junior officer backbone, but enough to generally handle the smaller size of the CMF. By the 1990s the Ready Reserve scheme only succeeded in this regard because of much smaller numbers, the use of regular NCO, and the one year of initial full-time training laying a good base for growing future NCO. The general trend, however, since 1950 has been one of constant decline in overall numbers and especially in experienced reservist senior NCO.

Finally, the book recounts the lamentable delay in the CMF obtaining appropriate conditions of service. Tax-free pay, for example, was only granted in 1964 and civilian job protection and employer incentives were ineffective until the 1990s. McCarthy also records in detail the fatal handicap on Army Reserve morale, development and utility caused by the reluctance of governments until the

1990s to effectively remove the legislative restrictions on its employment.

Dayton McCarthy's *The Once and Future Army* is a solid, truly analytical and optimistic appraisal of why the Australian Army should value its reserve component. The book should be compulsory reading for any officer before taking up sub-unit command in either the regular or reserve components of the Army. It is essential reading for any Australian who needs to form a view or make a decision on whether we need an Army Reserve. ♦

Dayton McCarthy, *The Once and Future Army: A History of the Citizen Military Forces 1947-1974*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2003, casebound and jacketed, 303pp, RRP \$55.00.



Howard's War

Alison Broinowski

Reviewed by Neil James

The Army's Command and Staff College (C&SC) was based at Fort Queenscliff in Victoria from 1946 until it merged with the new Joint Command and Staff College in Canberra in 2000. Fort Queenscliff's tertiary-level course was one of the best in the world and its Australian defence and strategic studies components were particularly well structured. Near the end of the course each year three academics or prominent commentators would be invited to provide their perspectives on Australia's future from the left, centre and right of the political spectrum respectively.

Alison Broinowski, a retired diplomat and sometime academic, occasionally presented the left-wing view when other champions of the Left, such as Professor Joe Camilleri, were unavailable. It is a tribute to the Australian Army that its intellectual and professional integrity enabled C&SC students to have such experiences. This could be contrasted quite distinctly with the pronounced lack of diversity or balance in many other Australian university courses—and in many books ostensibly on the subject of Australia's national security.

Books written before or just after the shooting

has ended are rarely good journalism, perceptive commentary or memorable history. Alison Broinowski's polemic, *Howard's War*, reinforces this rule although it is at least broadly consistent with the politely couched but dogmatic views she first espoused at Fort Queenscliff over a decade ago.

A few parts of the book make some attempt at academic-style rigour but this is almost invariably marred by the general tone of shrill and unleavened condemnation, and by its continual deployment of flawed assumptions with no attempt at objectivity or balance. If you hate John Howard, or indeed any right of centre Australian politician since World War II, you should relish this book for its subjectivity.

Howard's War is based on an underlying and not always unspoken assumption that the USA and especially its current government are always 'the baddies', and that Australia's alliance with the US is both completely wrong strategically and utterly immoral. Her book regurgitates most of the simplistic and tired old anti-American prejudices common in Australian undergraduate discourse since the early 1950s.

You really have to wonder whether Mrs Broinowski's views have matured since the days of the anti-Vietnam moratorium marches. This book offers no real alternative proposals for Australian national security policy. There are some ephemeral suggestions of appeasement and moral isolationism, especially in her views about accommodating terrorism by Islamic extremists rather than fighting it. Many would also quibble with her position that while Iraq is now free of its despotism this is no moral or other justification, secondary or otherwise, for Australian participation.

Other critics of John Howard's decision to join the 'Coalition of the Willing' over Iraq have mounted cogent and sustained arguments to support the general proposition. It can be done if an objective effort is made and this book is especially disappointing for the lack of effort and rigour applied. Her argument that Australia's alliance with the US makes us a target for Islamic terrorists is simply shallow. Others have made far better attempts and have avoided the whiff of moral cowardice when so doing.

Howard's War is the type of book read by only four groups of people. First, are reviewers who have to read it. Second, are close family members of the author. Third, are those who simply want their political prejudices massaged to climax. The final group are those who read such intellectual cowardice and tripe to keep their disgust fresh. ♦

Alison Broinowski, *Howard's War*, Scribe Publications, Carlton, 2003, soft cover, 144pp, RRP \$19.95.