



Military History & Heritage Victoria

Hard Fought: Australia in the Mediterranean Theatre 1940-1945

The 4th Biennial Two-Day Conference of Military History and Heritage Victoria Inc is planned for Melbourne over 9-10 April 2022.

This conference will examine the contribution of Australia's Army, Navy and Air Force to Allied operations and campaigns in the Mediterranean Theatre over 1940-1945. From Libya, Greece, Crete, Syria-Lebanon, Egypt, and Malta, in North Africa, Sicily, Italy, southern France and the Balkans, Australians in units or as individuals were there.

What were the strategic imperatives about the Mediterranean Theatre and why was Australia there? How did Australia support Allied strategy in the Mediterranean Theatre and what were the consequences for Australia after Japan attacked in the Pacific? What was the Axis opposition and how did the Australians measure up against the Italians, Germans and Vichy French? What was the experience of Australia's Air Force, Navy and Army? How did the Australian forces win victories, and how did they deal with their defeats? What was the experience of the Australians captured by the Axis and of Axis prisoners in Australia? How did the medical services cope? Who were the leaders and battle commanders? What were the stories of courage in ground, sea and air battles? How have we remembered those who fell?

Conference Chair: Dr Peter Edwards AM

Professor Peter Edwards (Deakin) is a diplomatic and military historian and is the Vice-Patron of MHHV. Educated at the University of Western Australia and the University of Oxford, he worked for the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Australian National University and the University of Adelaide before being appointed Official Historian and general editor of *The Official History of Australia's Involvement in Southeast Asian Conflicts 1948–1975* in 1982 at the Australian War Memorial. Since leaving the AWM Dr Edwards has worked as a senior academic, scholar and historical consultant. Of particular relevance to this conference is his publication *Prime Ministers and Diplomats: The Making of Australian Foreign Policy, 1901–1949*.

Convenor: Dr Andrew Kilsby

Dr Andrew Kilsby served for 23 years in the Australian Regular Army and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade before moving to corporate roles and consulting in Asia and Australia. He completed his PhD at ADFA@UNSW. He has several military history publications to his credit including *The Forgotten Cruiser: HMAS Melbourne 1 1913-1928*, with Greg Swinden. His most recent, *The Reservists: Through the Eyes of the Defence Reserves Association 1970-2020*, is to be published this year. A founder of Military History & Heritage Victoria Inc., Dr Kilsby has convened and presented at military history conferences, curated historical exhibitions, and written numerous articles and biographies.



Military History & Heritage Victoria

SATURDAY 9 APRIL

8:30 – 9:00 | Conference Registration

9:00 – 9:15 | Opening Remarks

Major-General Jim Barry AM, MBE, RFD, ED (Rtd), MHHV Patron

9:15 – 10:00 | Keynote: Australia and the Mediterranean Theatre 1940-1945

Emeritus Prof. David Horner AM, Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University

10:00 – 10:30 | Morning Tea

10:30 – 11:45 | Session 1

Session 1 | Strategy, Politics and Diplomacy 1939-1942

Nicole Townsend, PhD candidate at UNSW Canberra & researcher on the Official History of Australian Operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Fuelling the nation: Australia's economic imperative in the Mediterranean theatre.

Ian Crellin, Independent Historian

The influence of the northern threat on the conduct of the North African campaign: Australian and New Zealand Divisions' roles in development of the Syrian bastion defence line in early 1942 and in the subsequent defence of Egypt

Panel Chair: Professor Peter Edwards, AM, Conference Chair and MHHV Vice-Patron

11:50 - 12:30 | Session 2

Session 2: Australia & the War at Sea

Mike Carlton AM, author of *Cruiser (HMAS Perth)*, *First Victory* and *Flagship*.

12:30 – 1:30 | Lunch

1:30 – 2:45 | Session 3



Military History & Heritage Victoria

Session 3 | First Shots 1940-41

Greg Pierce, Independent researcher and writer, supported by the Sea Power Centre – Australia

HMAS Stuart: The ebb and flow of capability 1939-1941

Mike Rosel, Writer and Independent Historian

A Rat of Tobruk

Panel Chair: Major-General Jim Barry AM, MBE, RFD, ED (Rtd), MHHV Patron

2:45 – 3:15 | Afternoon Tea

3:15 – 3:55 | Session 4

Session 4 | The Campaign for Greece and the Battle for Crete

Dr Peter Ewer, author of *Forgotten Anzacs*

The Commitment to Greece: Military Folly as Political Masterstroke

4:00 – 5:15 | Session 5

Session 5 | Greece & Crete

Brent D Taylor, MHHV member, author of *Leadership in Crisis: Blamey at War*
Blamey as Commander – Greece

CPOETC Pete Cannon, CSM RAN

At all Costs: The Royal and Royal Australian Navies in the Defence of Crete, 1941

Panel Chair: **Tony Tsourdalakis**, President, Cretan Federation of Australia & NZ and member, MHHV

CONVENOR – end of day and dinner arrangements

6:00 pm for 6:30 PM – drinks at RSL bar downstairs

6:30 - 9:30 pm | Conference Dinner & Speaker

(Separate event arrangements at same venue)

Introduction: **Professor Peter Edwards, AM**, MHHV Vice-Patron

Emeritus Prof. David Horner AM, Strategic & Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University

Australian War Leadership



Military History & Heritage Victoria

SUNDAY 10 APRIL

9:00 – 10:10 | Session 6

Session 6 | Prisoners of War and Resistance

Stephen Hutcheon, Australian Broadcasting Corporation
The digger from Shanghai: Escape from Greece

Jim Claven, MA, Author, *Grecian Adventure - Anzac Trail Stories & Photographs - Greece 1941*
To Hell and Back - Prisoners, Escapers and their Helpers in Thessaloniki's POW Camp

Panel Chair: Lieutenant-Colonel (Rtd) Michael Buckridge, MHHV Vice-President

10:15 – 10:45 | Morning Tea

10:45 – 11:25 | Session 7

Session 7 | Australia & the War in the Air

Martin James, RAAF Historian

11:30 – 12:40 | Lunch

12:40 – 1:50 | Session 8

Session 8 | Syria, Lebanon, and North Africa

Dr David Sutton, Military History Section, AWM
Syria and Lebanon 1941: the Allied fight against the Vichy French

David Mitchelhill-Green, author of *Hitler's War in North Africa*
Tobruk – a comparative study of the two sieges TBC

Panel Chair: Richard James, author of *Australia's War with France*

1:50 – 2:30 | Session 9

Session 9 | The Medical Services

Colonel (Rtd) Brett Courtenay OAM, AASM, AFG ASM, HOSM, ADM, LSM, NATO DPM, former Senior Health Advisor, 2 DIV HQ and Conjoint A/Prof UNSW and Adjunct A/Prof Notre Dame, Orthopaedic Surgeon (St Vincents) MB BS FRACS



Military History & Heritage Victoria

2:30 – 3:05 | Session 10

Session 10 | Final Shots 1943-1945

Adam Lunney, Independent Researcher & Historian

Just the Right Amount of War? The operations of 451 (RAAF) Squadron from Corsica, 1944

3:05 - 3:30 | Afternoon Tea

3:30 - 4:40 | Session 11

Session 11 | Courage and Leadership, Memorials and Memories

Janet Roberts-Billett, MA Historian, Naval Historical Society of Australia (Vic) & MHHV member

The Dominion Yachtsmen Scheme: 'Hot Shot' Australians in Combined Operations in the Mediterranean 1942-45

Dr Andrew Kilsby, Connect-History & MHHV member

Some Fine Men Died Today: Adloun, Lebanon, Tobruk and West Point 24, El Alamein, North Africa

Panel Chair: Colonel Brett Courtenay (Rtd)

4:40 – 5:00 | Closing Remarks

Conference Chair

Professor Peter Edwards, AM

Major-General Jim Barry AM, MBE, RFD, ED (Rtd), MHHV Patron