



DEFENDERS OF THE QUEEN IMPERIAL AND COLONIAL DEFENCE 1850 -1901

KEYNOTE - DR CRAIG WILCOX

ONE-DAY CONFERENCE SUNDAY 5 NOVEMBER 2023
WAVERLEY RSL

161 COLEMAN PARADE, GLEN WAVERLEY, MELBOURNE.



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BOOKS

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Keynote Speaker – Dr Craig Wilcox

Paper - Maritime frontier conflict, and other items from the colonial military history to-do list

Abstract - What do we know about Australian military history from 1850 to 1901, and what don't we know? A lot in both cases, but one gap in our understanding seems striking. For all the attention given to the struggle between British settlers and Aborigines in nineteenth century Australia, we're not seeing a maritime counterpart to it in commercial scuffles on islands around Australia, in the policing of Pacific islands by warships based in Sydney, and in the occupation and pacification of Papua. Thinking about a maritime or Pacific theatre of frontier conflict reminds us of Australia's longstanding power in the region. It also challenges how we think about conflict on the Australian inland.

Bio - Craig Wilcox is a historian who lives and writes in Sydney. His books include *Australia's Boer War* (2002), *Red Coat Dreaming* (2009), *Badge Boot Button* (2017) and *Australia's Tasman Wars* (2022). He also wrote the entry on historian Charles Bean for the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (2006) and on the NSW Labor politician Graham Richardson for the Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate (2017).

Captain Ainsley Morthorpe CSM RAN

Paper – The 19th Century imperial maritime experience and how it shaped the strategic thinking of Rear Admiral Creswell

Abstract - Over the course of the 19th Century political and maritime influencers were attempting to shape the grand-strategic thinking of the imperial British diaspora in what became known as Australia. This thinking was shaped by an ongoing cultural link to the 'Homeland,' of Britain, which predisposed most commentators to want to imitate the cultural, political and social mores of the British. This also shaped an intellectual deference to the idea that the British were, and would remain to be, the dominant sea-power of the region, if not the world – the author Gregory Melleuish described this strategic consciousness as being in the grip of 'the meta-narrative of Empire'.

This narrative created a series of biases in the decision makers of the time which shaped the debates as to what form the defence of Australia should take. The assessment of the threats to Australia's sovereignty and wealth were seen through the bi-focal lens of the dominance of the Empire as measured against the increasingly independent views of governments and mercantile leaders over

the boom periods of the mid to late 19th Century. This understanding of the threat drove the debates of what form the protections of this wealth should take. I will highlight how the national cognitive biases of a majority of people and leaders who saw the land of Australia as being 'girt by beach' was challenged by agitators, such as William Creswell, who combined many arguments to collectively argue that our threats would be manifested on the ocean as far away as where our trade came from, throughout the sea-lines of communication from whence our wealth was derived. Their 'girt by sea' view grew over this period to set the preconditions of the early 20th Century development of a 'blue-water' Australian Navy.

Bio - Ainsley Morthorpe joined the Royal Australian Navy in 1986. He specialised as a Mine Warfare Officer for Landing Craft, Mine Hunters, a Replenishment Ship, Destroyer Escorts, Frigates and Destroyers. He was promoted to Lieutenant Commander in 1999 and was posted to the New Zealand Navy Frigate *Canterbury*. During his career, he deployed to East Timor, Middle East & Solomon Islands. He was promoted to Commander in 2006 and became the Head of Operations (J3) at HQ Northern Command, being awarded a Conspicuous Service Medal for his service. Captain Morthorpe assumed Command of the Victorian Naval base HMAS Cerberus in December 2020.

Major-General Mike O'Brien CSC MDA (Rtd)

Paper - La Trobe's Army

Abstract – This presentation will examine the British Army in Victoria during the superintendency and lieutenant-governorship of Charles Joseph La Trobe. It will look at command, the regiments involved, their accommodation, tasking and what the citizens of Victoria thought of them.

Bio – Mike O'Brien is the president of the Royal United Services Institute in Victoria. He graduated from RMC Duntroon in 1968 and served in Vietnam as an infantry platoon commander and intelligence officer. He later wrote *Conscripts and Regulars: with the Seventh Battalion in Vietnam 1967-68 and 1970-71*. Mike ran a successful antiquarian book business after leaving the Army and as a serving Reservist, supervised an Australian Government undertaking to co-ordinate the recovery and identification of more than 100 Australian soldiers killed in action in 1916 at the Battle of Fromelles, France. His oversight of the large military history collection of the RUSI Library has given Mike new opportunities to research colonial military history in Victoria.

Mr Gregory Blake

Paper - Eureka and the British Army

Abstract – On Sunday 3rd December 1854 British infantry of the 40th and 12th Regiments with police in support attacked a rough stockade that had been built by insurgent miners at Eureka on the Ballarat gold diggings. The miners fought back for a good ten minutes killing and wounding soldiers. In the end though numbers and firepower prevailed and the army stormed the stockade. Eureka was a unique event in our national history and one subject to myth and misunderstanding since the day it occurred. Rather than a brutal massacre of innocent unarmed civilians by the military as it has been remembered in some popular history the battle for the Eureka stockade was indeed a battle, fought out as hard as possible by the miners and a shock to the soldiers who participated. It is high time that we came to terms with what really happened on that day back in December 1854.

Bio - Gregory Blake was born in Melbourne in 1955. Since a very early age, he has had a keen interest in military history and has written numerous articles on the subject, for publications in Australian, the UK and the US. His publications include *Eureka Stockade: A ferocious and bloody battle, To Pierce the Tyrant's Heart: The Battle for Eureka Stockade: 3 December 1854* and *Jungle Cavalry: Australian Independent Companies and Commandos 1941-1945*. Greg is a secondary school teacher at Mt Isa in Queensland and tutor at the Australian Defence Force Academy. Greg served with the Australian Army Reserve during the 1970s and 1980s. He is an accomplished artist and has contributed his talents to illustrate magazines and instructional texts both in Australia and overseas.

Mr Jeff Hopkins-Weise MPhil

Paper: Victoria and the New Zealand Wars of the 1860s: and the Victorians in the Taranaki Military Settlers and the New Zealand Armed Constabulary

Abstract – The Australian colonies played significant roles in the imperial and colonial war effort underway in New Zealand during the wars of the 1860s. One crucial aspect was as a source for additional personnel available for the campaigns which unfolded in Taranaki, the Waikato, and elsewhere on the east and west coasts of New Zealand's North Island. This paper explores those colonial Victorians who enlisted as part of the 'Melbourne Contingent' of the Taranaki Military Settlers Regiment in 1863-64, and later, the Melbourne-based recruitment drive for New Zealand's Armed Constabulary during 1868-69.

Bio - Jeff Hopkins-Weise is a professional historian with many years of history, heritage, and publications engagement including an exploration of Australia's involvement in the New Zealand wars, *Blood Brothers: The Anzac Genesis* (Penguin Books & Wakefield Press, 2009), through to First World War centenary commemorative releases for the Queensland Museum, *Mephisto: Technology, War and Remembrance* (2018), and *The ANZAC Legacy* (2019). He is currently an historian with the Community Engagement Team in the Department of Veterans' Affairs in Canberra.

Dr Andrew Kilsby

Paper - The Battle for Oakleigh Station 1888; Nordenfelts, Landmines and 'Khakee'

Abstract

With the establishment of a Defence Department and formal militia in 1885, in the midst of war alarms, it was believed that Melbourne could potentially be attacked via Westernport Bay. A series of training exercises took place which tested out the potential defences of the important rail hub at Oakleigh, which gave direct access to Melbourne and avoided the marshy coastal strip. The advent of new military thinking, equipment and organisation was demonstrated in an exercise in 1888. The training involved some key colonial military leaders in Victoria as well as Imperial oversight.

Bio – Andrew Kilsby is an independent professional historian who works in Melbourne. He has a long held interest in colonial military history. His publications in this space include *Lions of the Day, The Bisley Boys*, a PhD thesis on the Rifle Club Movement from 1860, much of which was included in *The Riflemen: A History of the NRAA 1888-1988*, and a number of articles and biographies in *Soldiers of the Queen*, magazine of the Victorian Military Society, such as 'On the Werribee - Volunteer Reviews and Encampments in Victoria 1860-1862', 'Octavius Skinner Burton 1823-1895', 'Fitzroy Somerset Lanyon Penno 1854-1930', 'William de Passey 1859-1942', and 'Francis Rawdon Chesney 1824-1902'.

Dr Robin Droogleever

Paper: Five Good Squadrons – An Appraisal of the work done by the 1st NSWMR in the Boer War 1899-1901

Abstract: Noted British Commander, Colonel Henry B. de Lisle, who had been involved with the development of mounted infantry since the 1880s and who had spent 12 months in South Africa in command of the 2nd Mounted Infantry Corps, which included West Australians and New South Welshmen, declared in February 1901 that “*Australia has proved itself the home of the finest mounted infantry material in the world.*” Generous words indeed.

It was through the effectiveness of colonial Mounted infantry, in our case the New South Wales Mounted Rifles, that the reputation of the concept of mounted infantry as a valuable arm of the Army in war time, was enhanced. Hardly surprising that successive colonial contingents from Australia, New Zealand and Canada were ordered to be mounted men only. When Australia became a federation, Australia’s colonial mounted forces simply were renamed Australian Commonwealth Horse. When the country’s military establishment needed to be restructured after the Boer War, the glowing reputation of Australia’s mounted troops was reflected in the changes made in 1903 and 1906 where mounted infantry was to constitute a significant proportion of the Commonwealth Military force and would emerge as the Australian Light Horse which we know served Australia so proudly in the Middle East in WW1. Those testing years in the Boer war had paid off splendidly.

Bio – Robin Droogleever is the President of the Anglo Boer War Study Group of Australasia and has written a number of books on the Boer War. Robin has written and co-authored several very well researched books on the South African conflict and is regarded and held in high regard as the best historian on the Boer War in Australia. Robin was born in England but spent most of his youth and early adult life in Natal, South Africa. He developed a keen interest in both the Boer War and the Zulu Wars during this period. He moved to Australia in 1981 and established the Anglo Boer War Study group in 1993. His most recent publication is *Five Good Squadrons*. He edited Banjo Paterson’s letters *From the Front* and has written a number of regimental histories including of Thorneycroft’s Mounted Infantry; of the Victorian Bushmen in the Boer War, *That Ragged Mob*, of the 1st and 2nd Victorian Contingents to the Boer War, *Colonel Tom’s Boys*, and of the 5th Victorian Contingent, *A Matter of Honour*. He co-authored a resource book on the Boer War with Max Chamberlain titled *The War with Johnny Boer*.

Mr Keith Quinton

Paper: John Blackburn and the Defences of Port Phillip

Abstract - The Victorian Colonial government first appointed English Civil Engineer John Blackburn as defence assistant to Sir Peter Scratchley in 1882. Between 1885 and 1895 Blackburn produced dozens of superb plan drawings of concrete and brick gun emplacements and magazine structures which formed the final defence system at Port Phillip Heads. This paper and the plans displayed today from the Australian National Archives collection, herald the long-delayed acknowledgement of the vital contribution Blackburn played in Melbourne’s late 19th Century defence.

Bio – Keith Quinton spent much of his childhood visiting Swan Island Naval Mine Depot and various ‘Heads’ fortifications, which fostered a keen interest in the warships and military fortifications that guarded Port Phillip during the 19th Century. He became a volunteer researcher with AAHU (Australian Army History Unit) – Fort Queenscliff between 2010 - 2020. Keith has authored and self-published through ‘Blurb Books’: *‘Defending Port Phillip’* (2009), *‘Port Phillip Forts’* (2010), *‘Shortland’s Bluff Battery’* (2011), *‘Stop the Pfalz-1914’* - The First British Empire action of WW1 (2012), *‘Collision’* - The marine inquiry into the loss of HMAS Goorangai (2016), and *‘The Life and Times of John Blackburn C.E. 1842-1911’* – Victoria’s Defence Engineer (2020). His articles on Port Phillip’s colonial defence history are available on the MHHV website.

Mr Brad Manera and Dr Catie Gilchrist

Paper - The Easter Submarine Mine Disaster, Sydney 1891.

Abstract - The tragic accidental detonation of a submarine mine in Sydney Harbour, witnessed by thousands of spectators on the nearby foreshore during the Easter military encampment of 1891, has slipped from popular memory. The base the victims operated from is today a popular restaurant and few bother to stop to view the striking and poignant memorial to those who died where it stands in Waverly cemetery. This conference provides an ideal opportunity for us to discuss an experiment with the technology of the day that went disastrously wrong and remember the untimely deaths of a handful of peacetime soldiers.

Bio - Brad Manera is the senior historian and curator at the Anzac Memorial, Sydney, the principal War Memorial for the state of NSW. He has worked as a historian and curator in museums around Australia for over 40 years from the Western Australian Maritime Museum to the Australian War Memorial. He is also on the board of the Sydney Harbour Federation Trust. These two roles interconnect when sites associated with events of military history significance are located in and around the harbour. His latest book, *In That Rich Earth*, is a study of the battlefields on which men and women of New South Wales have served from colonial times to the present.

Bio - Catie Gilchrist is a Sydney-based historian who has published widely on convict, colonial and military history. Her first book *Murder, Misadventure and Miserable Ends: Tales from a Colonial Coroner’s Court* was published by HarperCollins in 2019. Catie is the Exhibitions Research Officer at the Anzac Memorial, Sydney, and is an Honorary Affiliate in the Discipline of History at the University of Sydney.