



Fighting to the Finish: Australia in 1945 – Strategy, Victory and Legacy

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Saturday 11 October 2025 (Caulfield RSL, Elsternwick)

9:00 AM – 9.15 AM Conference Registration

SESSION ONE | Keynote

9.15 AM – 9.25 AM **Welcome**
Opening of the Conference
Major-General Jim Barry AM MBE RFD ED (Rtd)
MHHV Patron

Session Chair **Lieutenant Colonel Murray Duckworth, CSM**
MHHV Vice-President, Introduction of Keynote Speaker

9.25 AM – 10.05 AM **Keynote Speaker: Emeritus Professor David Horner AM, FASSA**

10.05 AM – 10:10 AM **Q&A**

SESSION TWO | After Total War: What's Next?

Session Chair **Jason McGregor**
MHHV Secretary

10.10 AM – 10.35 AM **Legacies and challenges for Australia's Military at War's End - Professor John Blaxland Colonel (Rtd), BA (Hons), MA, PhD, psc (RT), SFHEA, FRSN, FAIIA, MSM (USA)**

10.35 AM – 10.40 AM **Q&A**

10.40 AM – 11.00 AM

Morning Tea

SESSION THREE | The Final Battles

Session Chair **Lieutenant Colonel Michael Buckridge RFD (Rtd)**
MHHV President, Conference Co-Convenor

11.00 AM – 11.25 AM **To Buin: Australians in South Bougainville, 1945
– Dr Karl James**

11.25 AM – 11.50 AM **White Over Green: 2nd/4th Australian Infantry
Battalion - Final Campaigns in New Guinea from
Hawain River to Mount Tazaki, 1945 - The Hon
Paul Brereton AM RFD SC**

11.50 AM – 12.15 PM **“The Emperor as a means of surrender”: The
Takenaga Incident and the plan for accepting
Japan’s surrender. - Colonel Tim Gellel**

12.15 PM – 12.40 PM **1945 - the Viewpoint of Japanese Veterans - Dr
Peter Williams**

12:40 PM – 12.55 PM **Q&A**

12.55 PM – 1.45 PM Lunch (Bar open)

SESSION FOUR | Casualties

Session Chair: **Colonel Marcus Fielding (Rtd)**

1.45 PM – 2.10 PM **Aitape – Wewak: Casualties and Controversies -
Dr Jan McLeod**

2.10 PM – 2.35 PM **The post-war search for ‘closure’: Tracing the
war dead and informing families in the aftermath
of war - Dr John Moremon**

2:35 PM – 2:45 PM **Q&A**

2.45 PM – 3:15 PM Afternoon Tea

SESSION FIVE | Consequences and Retribution

Session Chair: Mr Brent Taylor

3.15 PM – 3.40 PM **The Dutch East Indies - The Rise and Fall of a South-East Asian Colony - Colonel Marcus Fielding (Rtd)**

3.40 PM – 4.05 PM **Pacific Reckoning: How Australia Brought the First Japanese War Criminals to Trial at Morotai - David Gormley-O'Brien**

4.15 PM – 4.25 PM **Q&A**

SESSION SIX | Legacy

Session Chair: Mr David Phillipson
Conference Co-Convenor

4.25 PM – 4.50 PM **The Struggle Against Forgetting: The Rats of Tobruk and the legacy of the Second World War - Dr Nicole Townsend**

4.50 PM – 5.15 PM **Imperial Muscle Memory in 1945. How colonial game playing in Europe affected post war Australia and the Indo-Pacific – Mr Phil Craig**

5.15 PM – 5.25 PM **Q&A**

5.25 PM – 5.30 PM **Closure of the Conference - Major-General Jim Barry AM MBE RFD ED (Rtd), MHHV Patron**

5.30 PM – 6:30 PM Drinks (Bar open)



Presenters



David Horner, AM, FASSA, is an emeritus professor in the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University. He served as an infantry platoon commander in the Vietnam War and later, as a colonel, was head of the Australian Army's Land Warfare Studies Centre. He is the author or editor of 37 books on Australian military history, defence and intelligence, including *The Spy Catchers*, *SAS Phantoms of War*, *Duty First*, *Blamey*, and *Battles that shaped Australia*.



Dr John Blaxland is Director of the ANU North America Liaison Office and Professor of International Security and Intelligence Studies in the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre (SDSC), Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, College of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University (ANU). A former Australian military intelligence officer, he is a trusted and highly regarded historian who has authored or co-authored over a dozen broad-ranging works on international, military and security affairs. He is also an occasional media commentator.



Prior to becoming Head of the Australian Army History Unit in 2017, **Tim Gellel** served as a Colonel in the Australian Army, with operational experience in Afghanistan, Kuwait and Japan. He is a graduate of the Royal Military College, the Australian Defence Force School of Languages, the Japan Ground Self-Defence Force Command and Staff College, and the Japan National Institute for Defence Studies, and holds a Master of Arts Degree (International Relations).



Dr Peter Williams taught history and English in Japan, where he interviewed 100 WWII veterans. He lives in Canberra, where he worked for the Departments of Defence and Veterans' Affairs. His PhD topic was the Kokoda Campaign and his latest book is *Japan's Pacific War: Personal Accounts of the Emperor's Warriors*.



Dr Jan McLeod has a PhD in History from the University of Newcastle where she held academic, teaching and professional roles. She has presented widely at academic conferences, history societies and community events, and twice served as an invited judge for the Australian Army's C.E.W. Bean Prize for Military History. Jan's first book, *Shadows on the Track: Australia's Medical War in Papua 1942-1943*, was published by Big Sky Publishing in 2019, as part of the Australian Army History Collection. Her most recent publication, *All The*

Broken Soldiers: Private Kennedy's War, was released in November 2022. This book is based on the wartime diary of one of two great-uncles who served with the 2/4th Australian Army Field Ambulance in the Middle East, Papua, New Guinea, and Borneo. Jan retired in 2021 and continues to research Australia's military medical history.



Marcus Fielding's first career was as a senior officer in the Australian Army, where he held a broad range of appointments in Army, joint and interagency organisations. He has served on UN demining operations in Pakistan/Afghanistan and multinational operations in Haiti, East Timor and Iraq. His second career is in the private and philanthropic sectors. He used his 'immediate past president card' to get this slot in the program.



Dr David Gormley-O'Brien enjoyed a long career as a university lecturer in the history of ideas and religions in Late Antiquity. He completed a Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Oxford in 2005 with research on ancient philosophical conventions of self-sufficiency and friendship. In recent years, David's work has turned to the human aftermath of war, migration, and national identity, explores how the upheavals of the early and mid 20th century shaped the ways everyday Australians understood themselves---and others.



Dr Nicole Townsend is a Lecturer in History at UNSW Canberra and a Director of the Second World War Research Group, Asia-Pacific. Her doctoral thesis focused on Australian strategic engagement with, and interests in, the Mediterranean and the Middle East during the Second World War. More broadly, her research has focused on Australia and the Middle East generally, including the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars, as well as contemporary defence issues in this region. She has previously worked on the Australian Official History of Operations in East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan, based at the Australian War Memorial. Her first book, an

edited collection on Australian perspectives on global air and space power, was published by Routledge in 2023.



Phil Craig is a bestselling author and multiple-award-winning film-maker. A former RAF cadet pilot, he studied history at Cambridge University, was a BBC graduate trainee and built his career working for iconic British TV series *World in Action* and *Panorama*.

Later he held senior positions at the prestigious Brook Lapping production company, at the Discovery Channel and at

ABC Television in Australia where he ran the entire factual output including its high-profile ANZAC centenary project.

Throughout his TV and writing career, Phil has spent many years researching and reinterpreting the story of Britain and its Empire during the Second World War, including his bestselling account of 1940 – *Finest Hour*.

He also hosts *The Scandal Mongers Podcast*.



Dr Karl James is the Head of Military History at the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. His research focuses on Australia's experience during the Second World War. He is also interested in Australia's commitment to the Afghanistan War. Karl is the author and editor of three books on Australia's campaigns in the Pacific War and has contributed to many other publications. He has curated several exhibitions, including *Victory in the Pacific!* (currently on display), a photographic exhibition marking the 80th anniversary of the end of the Second World War, and the forthcoming *Kandahar Workhorse: Chinooks 2006–2013* (opening 2026). Karl was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society in 2024.



Paul Brereton was born in Sydney and practiced as a solicitor from 1982 to 1987 and as a barrister from 1987 to 2005. He was appointed Senior Counsel in 1998. In 2005 he was sworn in as a Judge of the Supreme Court of New South Wales and joined the NSW Court of Appeal in August 2018. He is an Army Reservist who holds the rank of Major General. He enlisted in the Army Reserve in Sydney University Regiment in 1975, and was commissioned in the Royal Australian Infantry in 1979. He has served as Second-in-Command Sydney University Regiment (1994-6),

Commanding Officer 4th/3rd Battalion, the Royal New South Wales Regiment (1997-99), Chief of Staff 5th Brigade (2004-5), Assistant Chief of Staff Land Headquarters (2006-7), and Commander 5th Brigade (2008-10). From 2011 to 2013 he was Head of Cadet, Reserve and Employer Support Division. He holds honorary appointments as Colonel Commandant of the Royal NSW Regiment and the University of NSW Regiment. He also sat as a member of the Defence Force Discipline Appeals Tribunal and acted as Assistant Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force. Paul was honoured with membership of the Order of Australia (Military Division) in 2010 and received the Reserve Force Decoration in 1995. He led an Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force investigation into alleged criminal misconduct on the battlefield by Australian Special forces in Afghanistan, issuing the Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force Afghanistan Inquiry Report in November 2020. In 2023 he was appointed the first commissioner of the federal National Anti-Corruption Commission. He is Patron of the Military History Society of New South Wales.



John Moremon received his PhD in History from UNSW Canberra in 2000 and has a MA in Museum Studies from Massey University, New Zealand. He was a public historian in Canberra until 2007 when he began teaching defence studies at a university in New Zealand. After returning to Australia in 2025, he rejoined the Department of Veterans' Affairs as a historian. Being also an independent scholar, he continues researching Australian and New Zealand military history, with a view to publishing on

operational aspects of the Pacific War and casualty administration.