

Foreword

Several years ago, a group named Military History and Heritage Victoria formed to bring together those who were passionate about military history. After several years of examining military history up to the 1990s, we decided to look at more contemporary events; namely, the 1999 Australian-led International Force East Timor (INTERFET). In 2014, we brought together a tremendous collection of speakers to examine this key period in Australia's military history. The Strategic & Defence Studies Centre at The Australian National University partnered with us to make the event possible and, more importantly, to publish the proceedings with Melbourne University Press.¹ We would like to think that this INTERFET conference and the publishing of the proceedings contributed to the decision to commence the next tranche of Australian official histories.

Flushed with success, we then embarked on a conference regarding Australia's involvement in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Australian military has had a long involvement in the Middle East region, and Australian and coalition military involvement continues to this day in both countries. But we felt enough time had passed for us again to make a contribution by examining the period 2001–14.

We called the conference 'War in the Sandpit: Reflections on Australia's War in Afghanistan and Iraq 2001–2014'. The conference gathered a well-qualified panel of speakers, many of whom were involved firsthand in the decisions and events described. Once again, the Strategic & Defence Studies Centre at The Australian National University partnered with us to make the event possible. The proceedings are published here to add to the historical record.

1 J. Blaxland (ed.), *East Timor Intervention: A retrospective on INTERFET*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2015.

We know that the official history, in production at the time of writing, will produce a more informed and perhaps different record and perspective on events, but, as ever, history is not a static phenomenon. Our objective remains to examine history and seek to learn from it, drawing from the experiences and perspectives of people involved ranging from Cabinet members down to the practitioners on the ground, in the air and at sea. We hope this volume achieves that.

I would like to thank my friend John Blaxland for his support and patience in bringing these projects to fruition. We have known each other since we both first marched into Duntroon in January 1983 and served together on operations in East Timor. His contribution to the understanding of military history and more contemporary security matters has been exemplary, and we at Military History and Heritage Victoria are pleased to see this important work available for general readers to access.

Marcus Fielding
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