

7

Researching History at SDSC

David Horner

The Strategic and Defence Studies Centre (SDSC) now has the largest number of academic staff working in the field of military and defence history in Australia, and this should not be surprising, because history has always been critical to the study of strategy. This was particularly the case when in earlier times strategy was seen as ‘the art of the general’, but continued to be the case when strategy became the concern of politicians and, with the advent of atomic weapons after 1945, nuclear scientists as well. The introduction of nuclear weapons led to a new academic discipline, namely strategic studies, the imperative of which was exemplified by Bernard Brodie’s famous 1946 statement: ‘Thus far the chief purpose of our military establishment has been to win wars. From now on its chief purpose must be to avert them. It can have almost no other useful purpose.’¹ But history remained central to the new discipline. It was no coincidence that the distinguished military historian, Sir Michael Howard, played an important role in the founding of the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) in 1958. As the historian Brian Holden Reid explained, Howard ‘consistently argued that those who wrote about nuclear strategy and studied history “talked more sense” than those

1 Bernard Brodie, *The Absolute Weapon: Nuclear Power and World Order* (New York: Harcourt, 1946), p. 76.

who had not'.² Howard stated that he was 'unrepentantly a historian and not a social scientist. I think in terms of analogies rather than theories, of process rather than structure, of politics as the realm of the contingent rather than of necessity.'³

Yet, despite its importance, history has always had an ambivalent place in the research interests of the SDSC. From the earliest days of the Centre, researchers in the field of strategic studies in Australia struggled to define it as an academic discipline or, more correctly, were involved in a continuous struggle to have strategic studies accepted as a distinct academic discipline in Australia. It was not the same as the discipline of international relations, with its antecedents of political science, although strategic studies had much in common with international relations. More broadly, the study of current defence policy could be seen as straight political science, but there was more to it than just politics. Some aspects of strategic studies drew on operational analysis. When it came to weapons systems, a background in science was important. Hence some leading practitioners of strategic studies have been scientists and, indeed, when the Cold War was at its height and nuclear issues were to the fore, nuclear scientists were important contributors to strategic studies. Strategic and defence studies (to give it a broader title) can also include the study of operational concepts and, in this regard, previous service in one of the branches of the military provides a good foundation.

As emphasised earlier, history is an important component of strategic and defence studies. The best way of understanding strategic and operational concepts is to examine how they have been used in past conflicts. The allied discipline of military studies (or military science) also draws heavily on history. To understand command structures, leadership, the problems of introducing new technology, the challenges of recruitment, the stress of combat, and the myriad other facets of military science, the best starting point is history.

In short, strategic and defence studies is multidisciplinary in nature, and this has been borne out by the background of SDSC's staff over the years. The first head of the Centre, Tom Millar, came from the field

2 Brian Holden Reid, 'The Legacy of Liddell Hart: The Contrasting Responses of Michael Howard and André Beaufre', *British Journal for Military History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Oct. 2014.

3 Michael Howard, *Studies in War and Peace* (London: Temple Smith, 1970), p. 13.

of international relations; indeed he was member and later professorial fellow in The Australian National University's (ANU) Department of International Relations, a position he retained while head of SDSC. But he started his working life as a regular army officer, and his Master's thesis was in the field of military history — it was on the defence of the colony of Victoria.

The Centre's second head, Robert (Bob) O'Neill was also a former regular army officer. His first degree was in electrical engineering but he later switched to diplomatic and military history. His PhD thesis was a groundbreaking study of the German Army and the Nazi Party. The next head, Desmond Ball, was originally an economist who spent the whole of his working life in academia. His successor, Paul Dibb, was a geographer who had spent time in the Joint (later Defence) Intelligence Organisation and was a deputy secretary in the Defence department. A more recent head, Hugh White, undertook his first degree in philosophy; he too had been a deputy secretary in Defence. The present head, Brendan Taylor, was a political scientist and, like Ball, has spent his working life in academia.

The ambivalence towards history within SDSC comes from the fact that, for the work of the Centre, history is not an end in itself, but a vital tool to be used to underpin contemporary strategic and defence studies. If the Centre were to produce only studies of military or defence history — even if they made an outstanding contribution to understanding Australia's past — it would be accused of not engaging with current issues, which was the reason for its establishment. In short, the Centre needed to be seen as a relevant player in the broad area of contemporary strategic and defence studies.

From the early days, research in SDSC focused on three areas: Australian defence, regional security, and global security. The importance and priority of these issues changed over time. During the 1970s, global security (including the important work by Ball on nuclear strategy) and Australian defence were the most important. After the end of the Cold War, regional security assumed greater importance, and military history was not central to the work of the Centre. In its early days SDSC had a small staff (by 1974 it had grown to three academic staff — O'Neill, Ball and the distinguished journalist, Peter Hastings — and a research officer — Jol Langtry, a former Army colonel) and they needed to focus on the key strategic and defence issues of the day.

Much of the early work of SDSC members, however, had a basis in history. One example was Ball and Langtry's edited book, *Problems of Mobilisation in Defence of Australia* (1980).

Despite the focus on current issues, from its early days SDSC produced some important publications in the field of military or defence history. Millar's first major book as head of the Centre, *Australia's Defence*, published in 1965 with a second edition in 1969, was not a military history book, although it drew on the past to situate Australia's defence concerns in a historical setting. But after he stepped down as head and returned to International Relations, Millar published *Australia in Peace and War: External Relations Since 1788* (1978). This major study became a standard reference book for decades. A second edition was published in 1991.

When O'Neill became head in 1971, he had already made his mark as an outstanding historian. As noted earlier, his PhD thesis was published in 1966 to wide acclaim. His account of his battalion's service in South Vietnam, *Vietnam Task* (1968), was more than a standard battalion history and had thoughtful comments about the conduct of the war. In 1969 he published a biography of General Vo Nguyen Giap, the Vietnamese general who commanded the communist forces in the First Indo-China War and the Vietnam War.

In 1970, shortly before he took over at head of the Centre, O'Neill was appointed the official historian of Australia's involvement in the Korean War. This was a major and prestigious appointment. Australia had had only two previous official historians: Charles Bean for World War I and Gavin Long for World War II. O'Neill generally spent half of each day at the Australian War Memorial while he worked on the official history, and the other half at SDSC.

His official history, *Australia in the Korean War 1950–53*, was published in two volumes: *Strategy and Diplomacy* (1981) and *Combat Operations* (1985). This was the first time that an Australian official war history had a complete volume devoted to strategy and diplomacy, indicating that the reasons why Australia was involved and a discussion of the diplomacy were just as important as the actual combat operations.

At that time SDSC did not have PhD students of its own; they were officially part of International Relations, but in a practical sense they were part of SDSC. O'Neill's first PhD student, Neil Primrose, worked

on a military history subject — ‘Australian Naval Policy 1919–1942’ — and his thesis was completed in 1974. Another early PhD student was Carlyle Thayer, whose thesis, ‘The Origins of the National Liberation Front for the Liberation of South Viet-Nam’, was completed in 1977.

I first met O’Neill when he was a lecturer in the faculty of Military Studies at the Royal Military College, Duntroon, and I was a cadet there. After graduation into the Infantry Corps I served in South Vietnam and then returned to my overriding interest — military history. In 1974–75 I completed an MA thesis at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) at Duntroon and, although O’Neill was then at ANU, he was one of my supervisors. He assisted me to get my MA thesis published as *Crisis of Command: Australian Generalship and the Japanese Threat, 1941–1943* by ANU Press in 1978. By that time I was undertaking my PhD thesis at ANU under O’Neill’s supervision. It was probably due to his expert supervision that I was awarded the Crawford Prize for the thesis. It was subsequently published as *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy, 1939–1945*, in 1982, just as O’Neill headed off to the IISS in London. The Army gave me the time to complete my MA and PhD, following which I returned to work in the Army for almost a decade.

With O’Neill’s departure, SDSC had no specific expertise in military history, but it was still able to make a contribution in this field. In 1968 SDSC started publishing the Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence. Over the next 38 years, the Centre published 164 monographs in the series and, quite rightly, their focus was on current strategic and defence issues. But many of them had a historical basis and at least 11 were primarily military or defence history. These were: W.A.C. Adie, *Chinese Military Thinking under Mao Tse-tung* (1972); Geoffrey Jukes, *The Development of Soviet Strategic Thinking Since 1945* (1972); D.M. Horner, *Australian Higher Command in the Vietnam War* (1986); J.C. Blaxland, *Organising an Army: The Australian Experience, 1957–1965* (1989); Nicola Baker, *More Than Little Heroes: Australian Army Air Liaison Officers in the Second World War* (1994); M.C.J. Welburn, *The Development of Australian Army Doctrine, 1945–1964* (1994); R.N. Bushby, ‘Educating an Army’: *Australian Army Doctrinal Development and the Operational Experience in South Vietnam, 1965–72* (1998); R.W. Cable, *An Independent Command: Command and Control of the 1st Australian Task Force in Vietnam* (2000); Bob Breen, *Giving Peace a Chance: Operation Lagoon, Bougainville 1994* (2002);

Reuben R.E. Bowd, *A Basis for Victory: The Allied Geographical Section, 1942–1946* (2005); and Blair Tidey, *Forewarned Forearmed: Australian Specialist Intelligence Support in South Vietnam, 1966–1971* (2006). These history publications generally had some current policy relevance in that they particularly dealt with strategy, command, organisation and intelligence.

To a greater or lesser extent, I played a role in securing the publication of nine of these volumes. After I left the Regular Army in 1990 I returned to SDSC, initially as a research officer with responsibilities that included the publications program under Ball as the series general editor. In 1994, I transferred to the academic stream, but kept my responsibility for the publications program (still with Ball as general editor) through until about 2005.

From the time of my appointment at SDSC in 1990, I tried to publish defence history and current defence books alternatively, but over the next 15 years I was not as successful as I had hoped. During that time I published 18 books, but only four of them were on current defence issues and another was a compilation of history essays.⁴ The 13 proper history books were: *Duty First: The Royal Australian Regiment in War and Peace* (1990), *General Vasey's War* (1992), *When the War Came to Australia: Memories of the Second World War* (1992, with Joanna Penglase), *The Gulf Commitment: The Australian Defence Force's First War* (1992), *The Battles that Shaped Australia: The Australian's Anniversary Essays* (1994), *The Gunners: A History of Australian Artillery* (1995), *Inside the War Cabinet: Directing Australia's War Effort, 1939–1945* (1996), *Breaking the Codes: Australia's KGB Network* (1998, with Desmond Ball), *Blamey: The Commander-in-Chief* (1998), *Defence Supremo: Sir Frederick Shedden and the Making of Australian Defence Policy* (2000), *The Second World War: The Pacific* (2002), *SAS: Phantoms of War, A History of the Australian Special Air Service* (2002), and *Strategic Command: General Sir John Wilton and Australia's Asian Wars* (2005).

Breaking the Codes, which I co-authored with Ball, was a groundbreaking study covering the development of signals intelligence in Australia, counterespionage, and the establishment of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO). It complemented Ball's earlier work

4 The Battles that Shaped Australia (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994).

on signal intelligence, and consolidated SDSC as a source of expertise on intelligence and security — a crucial component of strategic and defence studies.

I admit that not all of these books fitted into the template of being history with a current policy relevance, but I believe most of them did. In general, my focus was on problems of higher command and the interface between the military and their political leaders — an issue that has continuing relevance. I was also interested in recent military operations, in the belief that research on them was necessary to understand the contemporary problems faced by the military.

During this time, I sought to interact with the wider military history community. In 1993 I became an inaugural member of the Australian Army Military History Advisory Committee. At my suggestion the Army established a history series, to be published by a commercial publisher, and I was editor of the series from 1994 to 2012, during which time the series published more than 40 books on Australian Army history. In 1994 I was appointed Chairman of the Armed Forces Working Party of the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (ADB) and later succeeded O'Neill as the armed forces editor of the ADB.

This focus on military history did not win wide approval within the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies at ANU. The first problem arose from the view of some 'mainstream' historians that military history was not a legitimate academic discipline. This misguided view might have been a hangover from the Vietnam War era, when many young historians were protesting against Australia's involvement in the war. The second problem was that the history I was writing was focused mainly on Australia. How could such research be accommodated within a school that was focused on Asia-Pacific affairs? This latter argument also applied to other members of SDSC who were focusing their research on contemporary problems of Australian defence. Such research fitted within the charter of SDSC, but did not seem to fit neatly into the School's focus on the Asia-Pacific. Following this line of argument, if a world-renowned scholar or practitioner such as, for example, Henry Kissinger or Sir Michael Howard had wished to take up an appointment at SDSC they would have been rejected because their focus was not specifically on the Asia-Pacific region. SDSC objected to the argument about the need to

focus research specifically on the Asia-Pacific region, especially when it was applied as the means of deciding funding within the School, but without success.

The net result of this approach was that the School decided that my position in SDSC should not be funded; that is, I would no longer be employed by the School or ANU. Fortunately, the Chief of the Defence Force, Admiral Chris Barrie, decided to fund a chair of Australian Defence History at SDSC. I was appointed and took up the position in July 1999. The title of Professor of Australian Defence History was chosen to emphasise the fact that I would be concentrating on matters that would have direct relevance to Australian defence. I would be concerned not just with the analysis of past military battles, but with broader issues, such as the organisation of Defence, the relationship between Defence and the government, strategy, defence policy, operational concepts and intelligence.

Two of my books, published soon after taking up my appointment, were my biographies of Sir Frederick Shedden, the longest-serving Secretary of the Department of Defence; and General Sir John Wilton, Chairman of the Chief of Staff Committee during the Vietnam War and a major contributor to the process that eventually resulted in the formation of the position of Chief of the Defence Force. The Shedden book was commissioned by the Secretary of the Department of Defence, Tony Ayers, before Defence decided to fund my position. As Professor of Australian Defence History, I had other research projects that were focused more on contemporary issues, one example being my book *Making the Australian Defence Force* (2001), which explored why this joint structure was formed in the 1970s and how it developed through to 2000.

Throughout this period, I was the only member of SDSC writing consistently on defence history matters although, as I mentioned earlier, other members occasionally included some historical background in their works on current strategic and defence issues. My solo work was to come to an end during the first decade of the new century.

In 2002 I was engaged by the Australian War Memorial (AWM) to undertake a feasibility study into an official history of Australian peacekeeping. The Official Historian for Australia's involvement in South-East Asia conflicts, 1948–75, Dr Peter Edwards, was appointed

in 1982, and, by 2002, the series was nearing completion. In 2004 the Federal Cabinet appointed me as Official Historian of Australian Peacekeeping and Post-Cold War Operations. Unfortunately, the government did not make any allocation of money for this project but, in collaboration with the Director of the AWM, Major General Steve Gower, we were able to put together a project with funds from Defence (which paid my salary), the AWM and the Australian Research Council (ARC). The project initially envisaged four volumes. The AWM provided two authors and a research assistant, and the ARC funds allowed ANU to employ an additional author and three research assistants. The new author was Bob Breen, who had served many years in the Australian Army, including as an operational analyst, and had written several books on operations in Vietnam and Somalia. He had just completed his PhD at SDSC under my supervision on Australian force projection in the 1980s and 1990s. His thesis was published as *Struggling for Self Reliance* (2008) as part of SDSC's Canberra Papers on Strategy and Defence.

SDSC now became the hub of a major history research project. Later the project was expanded to six volumes, including one on overseas emergency relief missions, funded by the Department of Defence. By its nature, an official history takes time. The official historian and their team are granted access to all relevant government records and there is no censorship. Each history involves research into a vast number of government records and much cross-checking to ensure that the record is accurate and will stand the test of time. The first volume, *The Official History of Australian Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Post-Cold War Operations*; Volume II, *Australia and the 'New World Order'* (which I authored), was published in 2001. Volume III, *The Good International Citizen*, written by myself and John Connor (originally from the AWM and later at UNSW at the Australian Defence Force Academy), was published in 2014. As explained later, more volumes were in the pipeline.

Building on the reputation gained by working on the peacekeeping official history, and the Centre's expertise in intelligence and security (*Breaking the Codes*), in 2008 SDSC submitted a bid to research and write the official history of ASIO. The Centre was successful with its tender and the project began in 2009 with me as project manager and general editor. The Centre was able to engage two more staff: Rhys Crawley and John Blaxland.

Rhys Crawley, who was completing his PhD on the August Offensive at Gallipoli at UNSW at the Australian Defence Force Academy, was engaged as the research assistant. Later, when he received his PhD, he joined the academic staff. His PhD thesis was published as *Climax at Gallipoli: The Failure of the August Offensive*, in 2014.

Early in 2011 the ASIO project was joined by John Blaxland who had spent many years in the Australian Army as an intelligence officer and, more recently, as Defence Attaché in Bangkok. More particularly for the project, he had published several military history books, including *Signal Swift and Sure: A History of the Australian Army Corps of Signals 1947 to 1972* (1998), and *Strategic Cousins* (2006), based on his PhD thesis, which he undertook in Canada. While working on the ASIO project, he completed his book *The Australian Army: From Whitlam to Howard* (2014), and published an edited volume, *East Timor Intervention: A Retrospective in INTERFET* (2015).

Like the peacekeeping official history, the ASIO project required research into a vast number of official records, most of which remained classified. Also, like the peacekeeping official history, there was to be no censorship of the ASIO history, but the government reserved the right to prevent publication of matters that might be damaging to national security. I wrote the first volume, *The Spy Catchers, The Official History of ASIO 1949–1963*, which was published in 2014. The volume was joint winner of the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Australian History in 2015 and received the British St Ermin's Hotel Intelligence Book of the Year award for 2015. The second volume, *The Protest Years, The Official History of ASIO 1963–1975*, by Blaxland, was published in 2015. The third volume by Blaxland and Crawley, *The Secret Cold War, The Official History of ASIO 1976–1989*, is due to be published in 2016.

The two official history projects, therefore, provided SDSC with a group of military historians who began to establish SDSC as a major centre of military history research. Because these historians were recruited for the official history projects, they did not detract from the Centre's traditional research on contemporary strategic and defence issues. Indeed, they were able to add to them. For example, Blaxland contributed his expertise in South-East Asian affairs and Blaxland and Crawley contributed to the Centre's teaching expertise in the area of

intelligence and security. This teaching complemented the Centre's long-standing expertise in this area that was developed through Ball's extensive publications over the previous three decades.

The official history projects were not the only reason for the expansion of SDSC's history expertise. In 2008 Daniel Marston was appointed a research fellow in a position funded by Defence. Employed to work on contemporary operational issues, he came with a solid military history background also, having completed his DPhil at Oxford University, where he was supervised by O'Neill, then Chichele Professor of the History of War, and then having worked at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst. When he left SDSC in 2009 he was succeeded by Garth Pratten (arrived September 2010), who was the original principal research officer for the peacekeeping official history and then, like Marston, was a lecturer at Sandhurst. He had recently published *Australian Battalion Commanders* (2009).

In 2011, SDSC won the contract to deliver the academic component of the Australian Command and Staff College (ACSC) and, at about the same time, as a result of restructuring within the ANU, the Centre was required to teach undergraduate courses as well as running the Master's program. As a result, SDSC was able to advertise for considerably more staff. The staff to teach at ACSC needed an understanding of military affairs and candidates with PhDs in military history were well placed to gain appointments to many of the positions.

Marston returned from the United States, where he had held the Ike Skelton Distinguished Chair of the Art of War at the US Army Command and General Staff College, and was appointed Professor of Military Studies in SDSC and Principal of the Military and Defence Studies Program at ACSC. Marston had already published several books on military history and, once back in SDSC, he published *The Indian Army and the End of the Raj* (2014). The book was runner-up for the Templer Medal in the United Kingdom.

Other new staff members of SDSC with military history expertise who arrived between mid-2011 and mid-2013 included Peter Dean, Jean Bou and Russell Glenn, all of whom had written military history books. Dean came from the University of Notre Dame, Sydney, and had recently published a biography of Lieutenant General Berryman, *The Architect of Victory* (2011). After joining SDSC he published

three edited volumes, *Australia 1942: In the Shadow of War* (2013), *Australia 1943: The Liberation of New Guinea* (2014), and *Australia 1944–45: Victory in the Pacific* (2016). Bou was a research assistant for the peacekeeping official history, during which he was joint editor (along with Peter Londey, one of the official history's authors, and me) of *Australian Peacekeeping: Sixty Years in the Field* (2009). He is the author of *Light Horse: A History of Australia's Mounted Arm* (2010). After joining SDSC he published *The Australian Imperial Force* (2016) and *The Australian Imperial Force in Battle* (2016). Glenn was an officer in the US Army, including service in the 1991 Gulf War and, after leaving the US Army, was an analyst with the RAND Corporation. He was already the author of numerous books and book-length reports, the most recent being a 2012 study of the second Lebanon War in 2006. His PhD was in American history with a focus on military history. Once at SDSC he published *Rethinking Western Approaches to Counterinsurgency* (2015).

SDSC's expertise in military history was strengthened further in early 2012 when Professor Joan Beaumont joined the Centre. She transferred internally from within ANU, having previously been Dean of Arts and Social Sciences. Beaumont is an internationally recognised historian of Australia in two world wars, Australian defence and foreign policy, the history of prisoners of war and the memory and heritage of war. She already had an impressive list of publications and, in 2013, she published *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War*, which was a joint winner of the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Australian History in 2014 and winner of other prestigious awards. In 2015 Beaumont was responsible for the participation of ANU in a joint international conference with the AWM to mark the 100th anniversary of the landing at Gallipoli.

The strength of military history at SDSC is driven home by that fact that in the three years 2013–15, SDSC staff members published 13 books on military, defence or intelligence history. These statistics do not include SDSC's publications on contemporary strategic and defence issues, where the Centre's strong record has been maintained. In 2015, SDSC had 21 academic staff (including three emeritus professors working in the Centre) and, of these, nine could be counted as a military, defence or war historian.

In addition to the impressive quality of its staff members, SDSC's PhD students have also undertaken research in military history. Recent successful PhD students have been Steven Paget, whose thesis was on interoperability between the Australian, British and US navies in naval gunfire support during the Korean, Vietnam and Gulf Wars, and who is now a lecturer at the United Kingdom Staff College; and Tristan Moss, whose PhD was on the experience and role of the Australian Army in Papua New Guinea in the postwar period.

By 2014 the Official History of Peacekeeping, Humanitarian and Post-Cold War Operations was languishing, primarily because the government did not allocate funds to the project and the original funds, cobbled together from disparate sources, had long since dried up. Only two of the planned six volumes had been published. Breen completed Volume V, *The Good Neighbour: Australian Peace Support Operations in the Pacific Islands 1980–2006*, in 2011, but it had not been cleared for publication by key government departments. By that time Breen had left SDSC and was Director–Deakin University Post-Graduate Qualifications and Academic Adviser at the Centre for Defence and Strategic Studies, Australian Defence College (although he remained an SDSC visiting fellow). The volume was finally cleared early in 2015 for publication in 2016.

Steven Bullard of the AWM (and an SDSC visiting fellow) completed Volume VI, *In Their Time of Need: Australian Overseas Emergency Relief Operations*, in 2015 with the expectation that it will be cleared and published in 2016. That left two volumes to be completed. Encouraged by Prime Minister Tony Abbott, Defence made funds available and a major short-term research project began in March 2015. Londey began Volume I, covering peacekeeping missions that began between 1947 and 1989, when he was working at the AWM, but when he moved to the Classics program in the College of Arts and Social Sciences at ANU, he did not have enough time to complete the volume. The funds provided by Defence enabled him to be released from teaching to complete a large part of the volume, and he was joined by Crawley, who had completed his work on the ASIO project, and became joint author of Volume I. The Defence funds also allowed Bou to be released from his teaching duties at the ACSC and he became the lead author of Volume IV, covering missions in Africa after 1992. He was assisted by Breen, Pratten, the official history's long-serving research assistant, Miesje de Vogel, and myself. Volumes I and IV were scheduled to be

completed by March 2016. This would mean that Australia's fourth official history series, comprising six volumes, had been managed and substantially written by staff of the SDSC, with some parts written by AWM staff working under my direction. There was a certain symmetry that the second head of SDSC, Bob O'Neill, had written the second official history series (on the Korean War) 30 years earlier.

While conducting the 2002 feasibility study for an official history of Australian peacekeeping, I was convinced that work needed to begin on another official history, covering Australian military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Following the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington D.C. on 11 September 2001, the Australian Defence Force sent troops into Afghanistan in October 2001; the troops departed in 2002 but returned to Afghanistan in 2005 and served there until 2014 when the commitment formally ended (although some troops remained). In 2003, Australia joined with the United States and the United Kingdom in taking part in the invasion of Iraq. Most of the Australian force withdrew soon after the initial campaign, but forces returned to Iraq in 2005 and remained there until 2009. Based on my experience with the peacekeeping official history, I knew that, with every day that passed, the writing of the new official history would become more difficult and, due to the political sensitivity of many of the operations, the Australian public and indeed the troops themselves had no idea what operations had actually been conducted, or why.

After agitating for many years, in 2011 I persuaded the AWM to commission a feasibility study into an official history of Iraq and Afghanistan and, in 2012, I undertook the study. The AWM Council agreed with my conclusion that a history was feasible and should begin as soon as possible. Attempts to obtain government approval were delayed by two changes of government during 2013 — Prime Minister Julia Gillard was replaced by Kevin Rudd in mid-2013 and, in turn, he was defeated in a general election by the Coalition led by Tony Abbott. As noted earlier, in 2014 the Abbott Government agreed to provide funds to complete the peacekeeping official history, thus clearing the way for a decision in April 2015 to fund the official history of Australia's engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan.

When SDSC was established on a shoestring in 1966, some of its far-sighted proponents no doubt hoped that 50 years later it would have developed to become the leading centre of strategic and defence

studies research in the Asia-Pacific region. This is now the case. The Centre's research focus has changed slightly, but still bears some resemblance to its original structure. Whereas previously it was built around three pillars of research — Australian defence, global security and regional security — in 2016 its research was focused on three 'clusters' — Australian defence, military studies and Asia-Pacific security. Military and defence history at SDSC stretches across these three research areas, providing a crucial underpinning for research into contemporary issues. Further, with substantial teaching responsibilities (which was not the case in 1966) history provides an ideal tool for introducing students to many of the key concepts of strategic and defence studies. SDSC is now a major centre for research in the field of military and defence history. This outcome could hardly have been imagined in 1966.

This text is taken from *A National Asset: 50 Years of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre*, edited by Desmond Ball and Andrew Carr, published 2016 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.