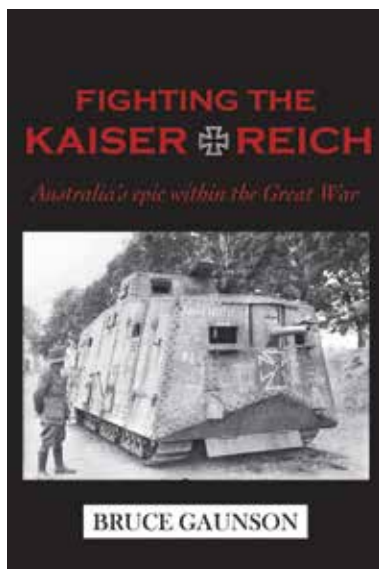


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Fighting the Kaiser Reich: Australia's Epic Within the Great War

Bruce Gaunson

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*Reviewed by Mary Fisher
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Fighting the Kaiser Reich by Bruce Gaunson is a book this reader wishes had been available in 1978 when a newly arrived and naïve American History teacher was assigned a job to teach World War I to a class of Year 10 students. A degree in American History had not prepared this reader for understanding the role of Australians in World War I, nor why they were involved at all.

A fascinating read from beginning to end, *Fighting the Kaiser Reich* tells a parallel tale of Germany's role in the South Pacific and Australia's role in World War I. It is full of interesting details from Australia's endeavours against Germany by exploring the Diggers' exploits against the Germans and ultimately the larger view of what the war was actually about while conveying the cost of the war to a fledgling Australian army as well as the staggering cost and immense grief to a fledgling nation.

To really understand why Australia was involved in World War I, one only needs to look north of Australia. Kaiser-Wilhelmsland (north-east New Guinea, Rabaul, Solomon Islands and Samoa) was a worry to the new Australian government. The lack of a credible naval defence left the young country with a potential threat on its doorstep. On August 5, 1914, Australia fired the first shots in anger at a German steamer out of Port Melbourne. This was followed by a ferocious naval battle at Rabaul, the capital of Kaiser-Wilhelmsland. If the Germans were to attain supreme power, the British concluded that their days as a free nation (including Australia and New Zealand) were numbered.

Plans had been made to create 'public panic' and 'great disruption' of trade and vital transport from Sydney to the Suez and Cape Town. Given this evidence, it becomes obvious that a global war already existed and that Australia was going to be a part of it. Eight months later, Australians would be involved in Gallipoli.

Gallipoli 'of all the bastards of places' outlines the terrible cost to Australia in a campaign full of 'should have and might have but ultimately didn't.' Outnumbered from the beginning, the whole campaign was a series of blunders. The initial belief that the

Turks were second-rate was quickly dispelled as they held the high ground. The lack of field guns and the staunch refusal to deploy them meant that, with no supporting fire, the Australians could 'neither attack nor retreat... they could only endure...'

Gaunson's book also dispels portions of the Anzac myth that has perpetuated throughout time: the failure of the entire Gallipoli operation was not caused by the Anzacs landing on the wrong beach; 'the British did not rely on Anzac troops for cannon-fodder' as 'British casualties at Gallipoli were at least three men for every Australian'; and finally 'the old line that the Dardanelles strategy was "a good idea, just badly implemented" is spin... Its naïve intentions were weighed down by amateurism, wishful thinking and delusions of superiority.'

The Gallipoli campaign kept our soldiers from the Western Front until 1916, where once again the command failed in its duty to plan and successfully execute campaigns. Here the ordinary soldiers used their common sense to sort out nonsensical orders that, in turn, saved their comrades, adding to the Anzac myth of valour, resourcefulness, tenacity and humour amid mortal danger

Fighting the Kaiser Reich is directed towards a general audience—there is no need to be an expert in military tactics or terminology to enjoy the book. Drawing from a wide range of primary and secondary sources from over 15 countries, it is an enjoyable read accessible to both students and scholars alike. For this reader, the interesting little tidbits that appear throughout the book filled in knowledge gaps that will carry through to students.

This text is a worthy resource for both students and teachers, and deserves a place on the most discerning bookshelf.