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Beyond the Broken Years: Australian Military History in 1000 Books

By Peter Stanley

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From its evocative cover to its extensively researched pages, Peter Stanley's *Beyond the Broken Years* critiques Australia's military history and the integral role played by historians (and other authors) in placing our nation's soldiers on an unparalleled pedestal. Stanley is well qualified to complete this detailed survey of Australia's military history, having authored thirty military history books and being a former Principal Historian at the Australian War Memorial.

Beyond the Broken Years has an extensive scope, beginning with the Frontier Wars and Sudan (1885), and culminating with the closing stages of Afghanistan (2021). In six parts, Stanley surveys the 'history' of Australia's military history from before World War I to after World War II, and explores themes in Australian military history. Within the short and passionate chapters, Stanley contrasts official histories, the accounts of ex-servicemen and women, the research of academic historians, and the narrativised writings of popular historians. Unable to cover the entirety of Australian military history writing, highlights include Stanley's reflections upon and assessments of C. E. W. Bean, Bill Gammage, Joan Beaumont, Alistair Thomson, Peter FitzSimons, Roland Perry, Mike Carlton, Les Carlyon, and even his own work.

Stanley is at his most evocative when his writing is imbued with passion and cynicism, challenging the power of popular historians and inaccurate myths. He ridicules the jingoism and bombastic nationalism that appeared in texts surrounding the centenary of World War I, especially around Gallipoli and Fromelles. Albert Facey's *A Fortunate Life* is reasserted as a fraudulent account of the Gallipoli landings, and the famous words of reconciliation from Mustafa Kemal 'Atatürk' are challenged. Stanley dismisses the shibboleths of the publishing industry that ultimately distort their historical accuracy, such as the misleading titling of texts on John Monash as a 'forgotten ANZAC', or the Korean War being a 'forgotten war'. In his disdain for myth regurgitating popular 'storians', Stanley highlights the importance

of unravelling historical records rather than further promulgating controversies such as the Japanese invasion of Australia in World War II, the 'hero or murderer' dichotomy surrounding *Breaker Morant*, and the power of the Victoria Cross in discussions surrounding Ben Roberts-Smith.

It is ultimately unclear who Stanley's intended audience is, and what his actionable purpose is. Stanley openly admonishes and disparages popular military historians, most directly best-selling author Peter FitzSimons, who he belittles as a 'storian'. Moreover, the broad scope and extensive survey of 1000 books and a plethora of topics may make his text overwhelming and thus inaccessible to broader readers.

However, for beginning researchers and existing academic historians, Stanley's work is vital, providing a provocative and erudite roadmap for the future of the discipline, suggested social history topics worthy of attention to move beyond the traditions of ANZAC, and a reflection on the fifty years since Bill Gammage's groundbreaking *The Broken Years* was first published, radically establishing the current field.

Reading the text deeply, there are clear implications for us as educators. Stanley leaves a number of unanswered questions. What role should narrative play in teaching History? How can we balance the existence of 'storians' alongside academic historians? Who should we refer to when engaging students in History? And, how do we interweave military and social history effectively?