

Lessons Learned: The Australian Military and Tropical Medicine

P Leggat

*Quail GG. *Lessons Learned: The Australian Military and Tropical Medicine*. Newport: Big Sky Publishing, 2017. ISBN 978-1-925520-22-4. Hardback. 254 pp AUD34.99 (also available as an eBook)

Throughout the history of modern war, tropical diseases have played a significant role in determining the outcome of various military campaigns through the ages. For example, malaria has remained one of the leading concerns in Australian military involvement in conflicts and other actions and led to the founding of the Australian Army Malaria Institute (AAMI), which was designated as a World Health Organization Collaborating Centre (WHOCC) for Malaria in 1980.¹ Lymphatic filariasis was another tropical disease that was also a significant burden during World War II.² Scrub typhus, a continuing problem for troops in north Queensland,³ was also described in the book as having a significant impact on military campaigns during World War II. *Lessons Learned: The Australian Military and Tropical Medicine* is based on a PhD thesis with the same title submitted by the author, Geoff Quail, which was completed in 2013.⁴ The PhD was undertaken in the Nossal Institute for Global Health, Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences, University of Melbourne, Australia. *Lessons Learned: The Australian Military and Tropical Medicine* traces the development of the (Royal) Australian Army Medical Corps (RAAMC), indicates the military links to the development of the discipline of tropical medicine, and examines the impact of and responses to tropical diseases on the Corps during wartime and peace actions. The conclusion in the abstract of *Lessons Learned: The Australian Military and Tropical Medicine* sends a clear message that the Australian Defence Force (ADF) needs to continue its commitment to and investment in research and training in tropical diseases.

Lessons Learned: The Australian Military and Tropical Medicine is presented as a 24 x 16 x 3 cm hardback publication. It has a dustcover, which has been illustrated. The front cover is simple in design with a photo of troops being immunised, presumably with the oral polio vaccine. It is a pity the cover is not captioned on the inside flap of the front of the

dustcover. The back cover of the book gives a brief description of the book and the back and the inside flap of the back of the dustcover includes a more contemporary photo of a soldier (presumably an environmental health officer) undertaking fogging against potential disease vectors. There is a lost opportunity to include a picture and biography of the author on the inside flap of the back of the dustcover. The work contains an Abstract, Preface, Acknowledgements section, Table of Contents, List of Abbreviations, List of Illustrations, List of Tables, Introduction, 15 Chapters, a Glossary of Terms, Bibliography and Endnotes. There is no Foreword or Index. It is surprising that a Foreword by another senior military medicine historian or current or past senior or general officer of the RAAMC was not included.

The chapters contained in *Lessons Learned: The Australian Military and Tropical Medicine* include “Ch. 1. The Impact of Tropical Diseases on the Outcome of Military Campaigns”; “Ch. 2. The Contribution of the British Military to Tropical Medicine Formation of the Royal Army Medical Corps and School”; “Ch. 3. The Great War and Tropical Disease”; “Ch. 4. The Second World War – Were We prepared for War in the Tropics”; “Ch.5. Post-War Lethargy”; “Ch. 6. The Riechmann Era (1984-2005)”; “Ch. 7. The Australian Military and Tropical Medicine – A Continuing Close Association”; “Ch. 8. The Ethics of Clinical Trials in the Military”; and “Ch. 9. Conclusion”. The work is presented largely in the chronological order of major conflicts of the past century through to the early stages of the current century. While it is based on the research of a single author, it is clear that extensive information was sought from others, as mentioned in the acknowledgements. It is significant and appropriate that Karl Riechmann, former Director of the AAMI, was one of these sources and indeed, he rates his own chapter in the book. It would be fair to say that under his stewardship, the AAMI consolidated its position as a WHOCC and as one of the pre-eminent malaria research institutes globally. The preceding year, in 2016, another book, entitled *An Unending War: The Australian Army’s Struggle Against Malaria 1885-2016*, was released by the same publisher and authored by Ian Howie-Willis.⁵

This latter book may appeal to those wanting to read more about the history of malaria in the Australian Army and its campaigns.

The author, Geoff Quail, is a doctor and a dentist and keen historian, having recently completed a PhD in the latter field. He has worked at both Monash University and the University of Melbourne and held the position of Head of Dental and Maxillofacial Surgery at Monash University for more than 30 years. He has also lectured at Oxford University. In addition, Professor Quail has had 40 years' experience in the Royal Australian Air Force Reserve and is regarded as a senior specialist in tropical medicine. He is currently the President-Elect of The Australasian College of Tropical Medicine and has served many years on their Council. In 2014, he was awarded a Medal of the General Division of the Order of Australia (OAM) for his service to medicine, particularly through his work in dentistry.

Lessons Learned: The Australian Military and Tropical Medicine is one of the first books to focus on tropical diseases and the Australian Military and it is a credit to the author. However, it is hard to ignore other reviews of the book that have been published.

A recent review⁶ alluded to extensive technical issues that often plague first editions of books. This review did also identify a number of gaps, such as the need to consider the role of military nurses,⁶ but then this might need to be documented separately as part of the development of the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps. Nonetheless, it is an easy reading book and it will broadly appeal to those interested in the medical aspects of Australian military history. It is likely that this book is a one off edition, so those doctors and medical historians wanting the book for their military medical history library are strongly encouraged to purchase a copy of *Lessons Learned: The Australian Military and Tropical Medicine*, while it is still widely available.

Reviewer: Peter A. Leggat, AM, MD, PhD, DrPH, FAFPHM, FFPH RCP(UK), FACTM, FACRRM, FFTM RCPSG, FFTM FFEWM ACTM, Hon.FFPM RCP(UK), Hon.FACTM, HonFFTAM ACTM is Professor and Director, World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Vector-borne and Neglected Tropical Diseases, College of Public Health, Medical and Veterinary Sciences, James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland, Australia. Email address: peter.leggat@jcu.edu.au

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5. Howie-Willis I. *An Unending War: The Australian Army's Struggle Against Malaria 1885-2016*. Newport: Big Sky Publishing, 2016.
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