

A personal history

The Royal Australian Army Medical Corps, 1945–1975

Colin M Gurner. Cheltenham and Richmond: Kingston Digital, and Abbott Inc, 2003. ISBN 0 646 42115 8

A COMPREHENSIVE HISTORY of the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps (RAAMC) marking its centenary was written by Michael Tyquin and published in 2003.¹ Now, Major General (Retd) Colin Gurner, AO, CBE, KStJ, ED, QHP, (Director-General, Army Medical Services, 1967–1975; Joint Services Medical Advisor, 1975–1977; and Surgeon-General, Australian Defence Force, 1977–1979) has written a uniquely personal account of the RAAMC, 1945–1975, which covers the period of the Korean and Vietnam wars. Its value lies in being a primary source of Australian military history written by a senior Australian Army officer at the centre of the action at this time, and it is therefore a precious document. This is despite General Gurner stating in the preface that it is an “unofficial” history prepared from his personal records and recollections.

For a book of 137 pages, it packs in an enormous amount of fascinating information, covering the early post-World War II period; the redevelopment of the Citizen Military Forces (CMF), 1948–1975; the Army Medical Directorate, 1948–1960; the development of the School of Army Health; the expansion of the CMF and the development of Australian Regular Army (ARA) medical units, 1951–1960; the Army Health Benefits Scheme; the recruitment of ARA Medical Officers; the impact of wars on the Directorate; and the Clyne and Gurner eras.

There are many fascinating photographs depicting the major military medical figures of this period, including General Gurner. Several appendices provide brief but informative biographies of great Australian soldier–doctors, including Refshauge, Hanson, Johnston, Glyn White, James, Coates and Dunlop. General Gurner’s involvement in the Order of St John and the St John Ambulance is also described.



Fortunately, General Gurner presented me with a signed copy of this privately published book, otherwise I would probably not have encountered it. For those who have caught the “history bug”, but also for those who want to find out how the RAAMC has arrived at its current stage of development, this little book is highly recommended. It should be held in all ADF libraries.

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Editor, ADF Health

1. Tyquin M. Little by little: a centenary history of the Royal Australian Army Medical Corps. Sydney: Australian Military History Publications, 2003.